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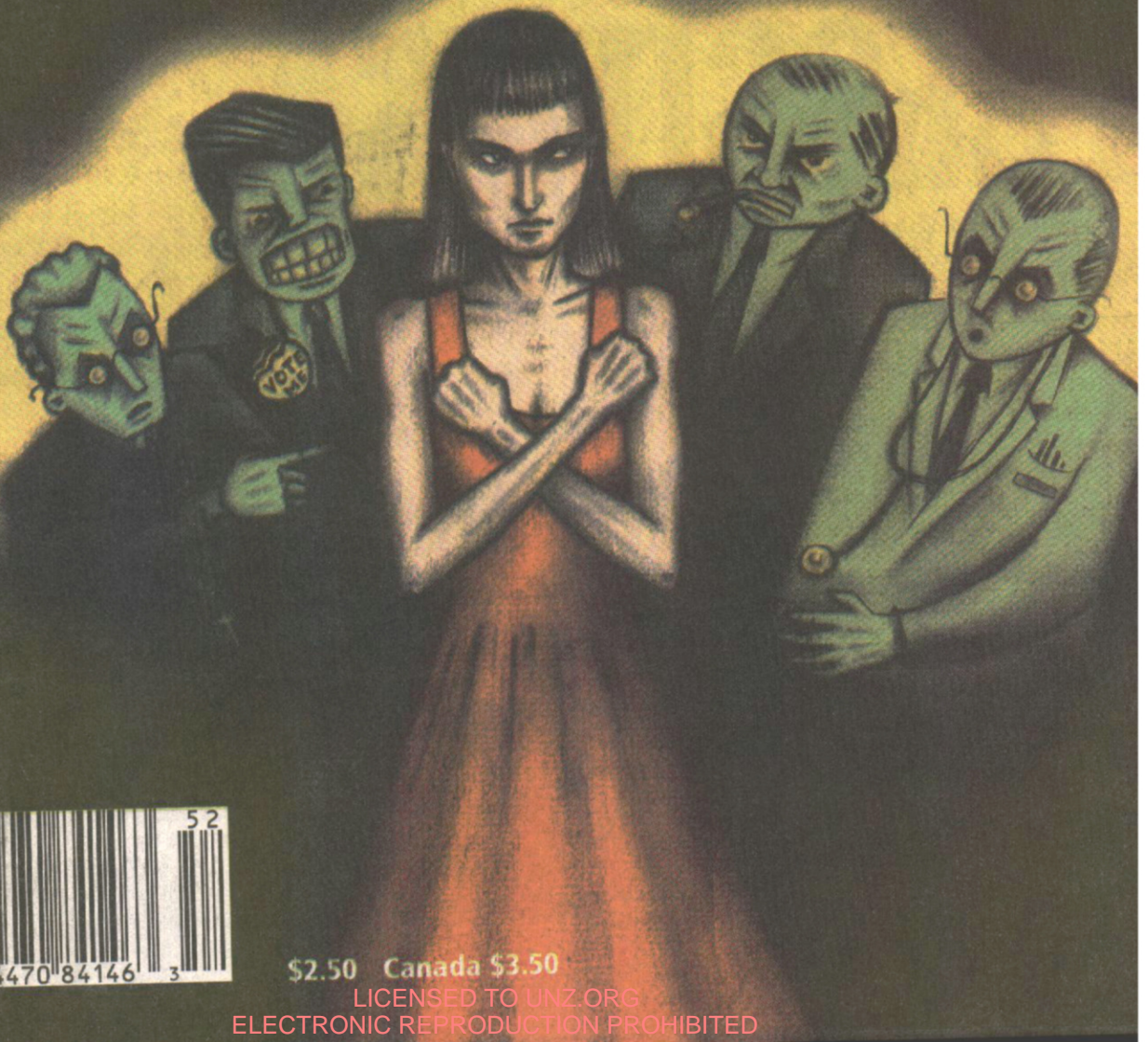
# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

March 21, 1995

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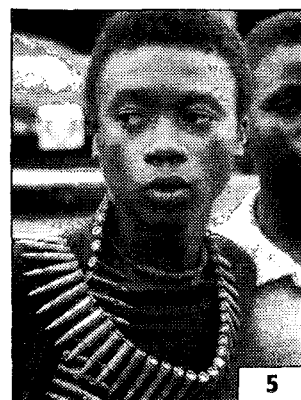
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## Misread History

As a history teacher who has been linking the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson to the attack on Bill Clinton, I was shocked to see a gross misrepresentation of the Johnson trial in Salim Muwakkil's "Wrath of the Bubbas" (Feb. 7). Without a challenge, he quotes Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) implying that the early impeachment was an attack by Democrats on progressive Reconstruction policies in the 1860s.

In fact, it was just the opposite. Johnson, the Democrat, had blocked progressive Reconstruction wherever he could. The Republicans—the far more progressive party on race in those days—were looking for a way to get him, so they trumped up a probably unconstitutional law for him to violate. They may have been the good guys, but it was indeed a partisan attack—though at least Johnson was impeached for a political crime rather than a sexual one.

Misreading—or not reading—history to make a political point doesn't aid the cause. It just makes us less credible and cheapens the real struggles for change, while encouraging the idea that history is an empty canvas on which we can paint our political prejudices.

Jeff Edmundson  
Portland, Ore.

## Sexism: The Next Generation

I read Kathleen Moran and Joe Sartelle's article on *Star Trek: Insur-*

*rection* before I saw the film ("Space Lift," Feb. 7). They were right on two counts: It was entertaining and lightweight. It also made one very relevant point about the evil of forcible relocation (Chiapas, anyone?). But what they completely missed was the sexism of the film. The Ba'ku (the idealized victims of evil) wore medieval sex-specific garb that inhibited women's mobility and functionality. Their male leader felt free to chastise the leading female in front of the Enterprise crew, and he said (get this!) that "when machines do the work of a man, that man is diminished." I thought that sort of blatantly male, pseudo-generic usage disappeared 20 years ago. But it seems to be returning, and I'm dismayed that *In These Times* writers, one female, didn't comment on its presence in this film.

Joan Walsh  
Durham, N.C.

## For the Dogs

Am I the only one who has a problem with the way the dog-fur-coat-collar story was treated ("Appall-o-Meter," Feb. 7)?

Coyotes *are* dogs. Taxonomists consider them a distinct species from wolves and domestic dogs, but that's based on minor and debatable details of hunting strategy, coat color and size. In every respect relevant to the morality of fur use—intelligence and capacity to feel pain chief among them—coyotes are indistinguishable from domestic dogs.

In fact, one could argue it's less defensible to use coyote fur. Coyotes are wild animals. Though ranchers often curse the critters, coyotes perform the important task of controlling populations of rodents and other small animals. For their occasional requisitioning of a lamb, they've been—pardon the mixed-breed metaphor—hounded by shepherds and other stockmen, subjected to government eradication campaigns and treated as moving targets by casual yahoo snipers across North America.

We can't have it both ways. If we're going to pick and choose which dog species to use as sources of fur, I say leave the coyotes alone and use humanely euthanized domestic dogs, who at least are a glut on the market. Better yet, leave the fur on the dogs, boycott fashion companies that traffic in animal misery regardless of the species, donate that money instead to wildlife protection groups (Wildlife Damage Review in Tucson is a good one for coyote lovers), and spay your puppy.

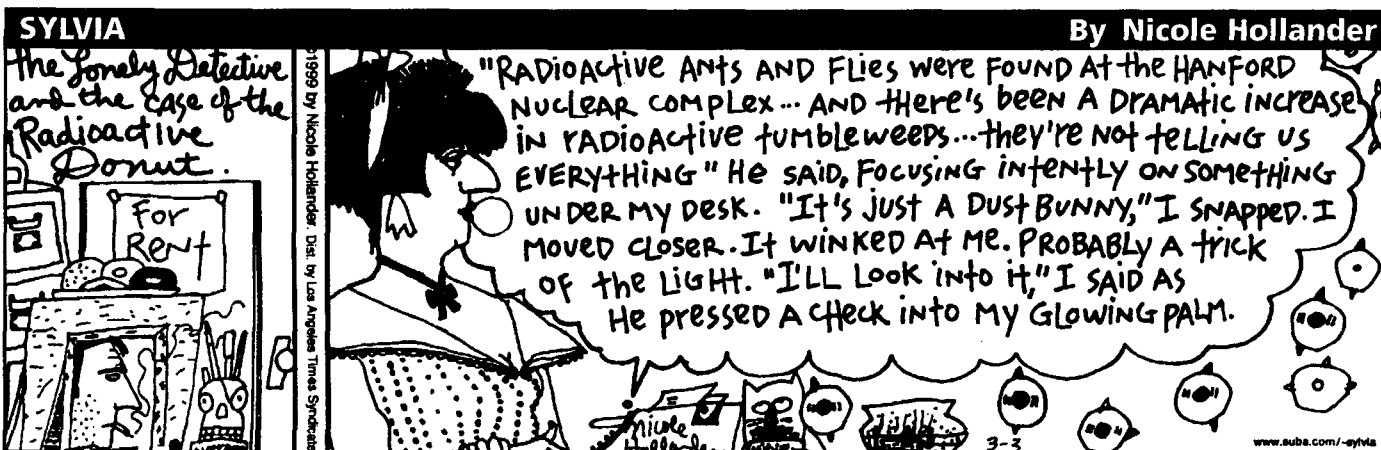
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# Teletubbie Politics

Just as Bill Clinton was escaping from his inquisitors with his presidency intact, the nation's sexual SWAT team set their sights on Tinky Winky. Jerry Falwell charged that this purple, triangle-crowned Teletubbie was "modeling the gay lifestyle." Speaking on the *Today* show, the reverend explained that "little boys running around with purses and acting effeminate" is something that "Christians do not agree with."

Falwell is spouting nonsense. Yet Tinky Winky, Laa-Laa, Po and Dipsy do provide a subversive alternative to his authoritarian world view. The Teletubbies live happily in an undefined relationship—are they siblings, friends, comrades?—watching out for each other in a make-believe land where no central authority directs their lives.

The Teletubbies' communitarian spirit stands at odds with the current political climate. Our celebrity-driven culture has left us well equipped to express shock and pass judgment on the individual actions of Clinton, Falwell or Tinky Winky, but we have lost our belief in the idea that collective efforts can better the common good. This is exemplified by the lack of public outrage at the Washington political establishment, which, having dissected the private morality of the President ad nauseam, is now preparing to pass legislation that will impose immoral public policies on the nation.

Social Security is under attack, not because it is in dire straits, but because it is based on the premise that we as a nation have a collective responsibility for the individual's well-being. The Republicans (and far too many Democrats) want to get the government out of the equation and let people play stock market roulette with their Social Security savings.

At the same time, Congress will tinker with legislation to ameliorate the most egregious failings of the HMO-based health care system, but will again fail to address the 43 million uninsured Americans who are one hospital visit away from financial ruin.

The Republican Congress and the Democratic president are prepared to allocate at least \$272 billion to the Pentagon in fiscal year 2000. That this engorged military spending package is coming down the budgetary pipeline with little organized public opposition indicates just how far we are from building a progressive political movement that would demand that human needs be put first.

Other examples of our collective immorality will not even be addressed by Washington's policy-makers. The ongoing destruction of Iraq by bombs and an embargo that has led to an estimated 250,000 infant deaths will continue. More young black men will attend prison rather than college, thanks to our failed war on drugs and

our inability to deal with the decay of our inner cities. And our nation's global trade strategies will continue ensuring that capital can move about the world without regard to how it disrupts human life.

In short, issues of community morality are lost when we would prefer to debate presidential infidelities, speculate on the proclivities of an asexual Teletubbie or be dumb struck by a right-wing preacher's stupidity. Indignation about an individual action is much easier to muster than outrage at the omnipresent social wrongs for which we bear collective responsibility.

The mainstream news media are partly to blame, with their incessant pursuit of the trivial, fixation on celebrity news and tabloid journalism, and inability to take editorial positions that might galvanize the public to right social wrongs.

In each issue of *In These Times*, we try to turn back that tide. While like King Canute (who tried to hold back the sea 1,000 years ago) it sometimes seems a lost cause, we provide news and perspectives that kindle an indignant outrage at the problems facing our society—and offer possible and practical solutions.

In the next couple months we will be asking you to help us put *In These Times* in the hands of more readers. To that end, we have initiated the Appeal to Reason

**Issues of community morality are lost when we would prefer to debate presidential infidelities, speculate on the proclivities of an asexual Teletubbie or be dumb struck by a right-wing preacher's stupidity.**

Campaign, a three-year project to triple our readership. When we began publishing in 1976, we were inspired by the *Appeal to Reason*, a weekly newspaper published out of the tiny town of Girard, Kansas, that played a significant role in the development of the Progressive movement at the turn of the century. The *Appeal* grew to have more than 750,000 subscribers by the early teens. One of the secrets of the paper's success was that like-minded organizations and readers—the "Appeal Army"—played a pivotal role in distributing the paper. Today, there are few organizations to support an independent press. We depend on you. Join our Appeal to Reason Campaign (see page 21). Do it for Tinky Winky. J.B.



# The Lost World

By Ted Kleine

CHICAGO

To the homeless men who lived there, Lower Wacker Drive was known as the "Lost World." A subterranean boulevard that winds beneath the Loop, Lower Wacker has been a popular sleeping spot for the city's down and out since the '20s. "It was a safe haven," says Elmo "Joe" Shelby, who lived for two years in the Lost World. "It's like a family there, and plus you didn't have to worry about the rain and the snow."

In January, the homeless' 70-year lease on Lower Wacker expired. The city locked the gates on fences that enclose the sidewalks and moved many of the street's 80 residents into shelters. Carl Brown, an 11-year-member of the "Lower Wacker Crew," thinks it's no coincidence that his eviction day came only two-and-a-half weeks before the Feb. 23 city elections. He says Mayor Richard M. Daley "got good publicity for getting people housing. [The city] claims they're gonna get people apartments, but it hasn't happened yet."

To Shelby, the closing of the gates was the culmination of a long campaign to shuffle him and his buddies off Lower Wacker. When police swept through in December 1997, "They threw all our stuff away," he says. Last fall, the city put up black iron fences along the sidewalks and police began warning the homeless that their time in the Lost World was almost up. According to Brown, "a cop said, 'Your days are numbered.' He was joyous."

The Lower Wacker eviction is part of a nationwide trend of treating people who sleep on the streets as criminals. In its report "Out of Site—Out of Mind?" the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty found an increasing meanness in the homeless policies of 50 major cities. In the past two years, the report says, 36 percent of the cities initiated "aggressive, intense enforcement" of anti-homeless laws. Forty-eight percent ordered police sweeps—"targeted removal of homeless people from particular areas of the city."

San Francisco, well-known for its large homeless population, has declared traditional sleeping sites off-limits. To get the homeless out of Golden Gate Park, the police department used a helicopter with heat-seeking equipment to spot people "jungling up" under bushes and trees. In January, cops swept through United Nations and Hallidae plazas, confiscating shopping carts. The homeless have been slapped with \$76 tickets for camping, blocking sidewalks, loitering and being in parks after hours. If they can't pay, they're often issued bench warrants and hauled off to jail.



TERRY LABAN

It's a modern version of debtors' prison. "San Francisco is very liberal toward peasants in El Salvador—it hates poor people in its own town," says Paul Boden of the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness.

Ironically, many of the homeless' woes are due to America's prosperous economy. The minimum wage has not kept pace with booming housing prices in big cities, and, as a result, there are more working homeless than ever before. A seedy flophouse room in San Francisco now costs \$500 a month, more than half the earnings of a minimum-wage worker. And every year, there's less cheap housing: In 1998, the city saw 1,200 evictions by owners who wanted to convert their buildings into chi-chi housing for yuppies rediscovering city life.

When Atlanta hosted the 1996 Olympics, the city tried to sweep its unsightly homeless population away from the eyes of the world by offering one-way bus tickets out of town. Those who wouldn't go Greyhound were jailed under newly enacted ordinances against begging and hanging out in parking lots. In the year before the games, more than 9,000 homeless were arrested.

Once the homeless had been frightened away, the city and the business community were determined to keep them out. In 1997, the Atlanta City Council passed an "urban camping" ordinance, making it a crime to sleep, lie down or store personal property in a park. "If you're lying down in Piedmont Park after a picnic and a hearty meal, you will not be arrested for urban camping," says Gerry Weber of the ACLU, which has sued Atlanta to strike down the ordinance. "The police are specifically targeting areas where the homeless find a place to stay." The suit is currently in settlement negotiations, and the city is considering revising the law.

But Atlanta police now have so many ordinances in their arsenal that they can arrest any homeless person, anywhere, for any reason. The sweeps are worst during big media events like the World Series. "There's a menu of ordinances that is used periodically," says Anita Beaty, executive director of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, "and it rarely has anything to do with behavior."

In Chicago, 39 members of the Lower Wacker Crew have a temporary home at Haymarket House, a substance abuse center that provides a minimum of 30 days of primary treatment, though the men can stay as long as they want if they meet the criteria. Upon leaving, they may be referred to halfway houses or a city-run transitional housing program.

The city has set aside \$120,000 for initial care of the Lower Wacker Crew. The money is expected to last two months, but Haymarket President Ray Soucek is talking with city officials about increasing funds. In addition, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless has asked the business owners along Lower Wacker—who requested the gating of the

sidewalks—to donate \$80,000 to a rental assistance fund and provide 15 jobs for ex-residents. So far, no deal has been struck.

Lieutenant Smith, who came to Haymarket House from Lower Wacker, is grateful he's getting treatment for his drug and alcohol problems. "I wanted to get help for myself, but I needed a little push," says Smith, who has been homeless on and off for the past five years. Once he's clean, he hopes the city will give him another little push by paying the first two months rent on an apartment. Several homeless men say the city promised them housing assistance to get them into the vans to Haymarket House. "They made promises on housing," Smith says. "It's time for them to live up to their end of the bargain."

Carl Brown is more cynical. If he's turned out of Haymarket House—as he suspects he will be after Daley settles into his next term—he promises to descend back into the only home he's known for the last 11 years: the Lost World. And if he's arrested? Well, that's already happened to him 20 times. It's just part of being homeless. "People are gonna be back on the streets," Brown predicts. "It's just like the World Cup [in 1994]. They cleared us out, put us in hotels, and once it was over, we were right back on Wacker Drive." ■

*Ted Kleine wrote about Meridel Le Sueur in the Jan. 10 issue.*

# Sierra Leone's Fragile Peace

By James Ciment

**W**racked by war, military occupation, foreign mercenaries, renegade soldiers and a particularly vicious rebel uprising for the past 15 years, the tiny West African nation of Sierra Leone is enjoying a brief respite from the bloodletting that has claimed thousands of lives. The war is a depressingly familiar one: a barely functioning government, a rebel force that often acts as nothing more than a bandit army and hundreds of thousands of civilians caught in the cross-fire.

On Jan. 15, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)—led by the imprisoned Foday Sankoh—agreed to a cease-fire in its struggle to oust a Nigerian-led peace-keeping force and overthrow the elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Three weeks later, Kabbah invited RUF officials to peace talks in the capital, Freetown. The move came as a surprise, since Kabbah had made it clear that he considered the rebels little more than bandits and mercenaries for neighboring Liberian President Charles Taylor. Indeed, the Kabbah government had sentenced Sankoh to death for treason and executed 24 of his followers last fall.

Like Liberia, Sierra Leone was founded as a haven for freed slaves in the late 18th century. Until 1961, the country was a British colony. After independence, Sierra Leone suffered from years of coups and political unrest, culminating in Valentine Strasser's military overthrow of a civilian government in 1992.

The country also faced a nagging rebel problem in its southeastern, diamond-rich region through most of the '80s. With the support of rebel factions in the Liberian Civil War, including the one headed by Taylor, the RUF engaged in diamond smuggling, banditry and gross human rights abuses, including mutilation, enslavement, rape and forced conscription of civilians. A peacekeeping force—known by its acronym, ECOMOG—moved in in the early '90s, leading an unsuccessful pro-government offensive against the rebels.

By 1995, the war had degenerated into a multisided free-for-all, involving government and ECOMOG troops; traditional government-supported ethnic militias known as *kamajors*; mercenaries from the South African company Executive Outcomes; rebel forces; and bands of "sobels"—meaning they fought as soldiers by day and as rebels at night.

Amidst the chaos, the country somehow managed to hold elections in 1996, leading to the victory by Kabbah, who then moved to negotiate a peace agreement with Sankoh in November. Three months later, ECOMOG had left the country. Feeling sold out, the political wing of the RUF, led by Major Johnny Paul Koromah, ousted Sankoh and overthrew the Kabbah government in a military coup in May 1997.

The international community slapped sanctions on the illegal regime, while Nigeria dispatched troops and shelled the capital from gunboats offshore. Sporadic but fierce fighting consumed the capital for most of 1997, until Koromah's government was defeated and Kabbah reinstated as president in early 1998.

Despite Sankoh's imprisonment—he resumed de facto leadership after

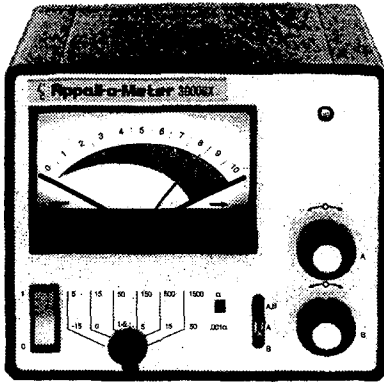
*Continued on page 6*

Terry LaBan



# Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle



## Process Makes Perfect **9.3**

Anthony Porter was almost killed by the state for a crime he didn't commit. He lingered on Illinois' Death Row for 16 years, until a Northwestern University journalism professor and his students investigated his case and proved his innocence. That doesn't mean there's anything wrong with the system—at least not according to Dave Urbanek, spokesman for Illinois Gov. George Ryan, who seems to think the real blame lies at the hands of professor David

Protest, for not assigning the case to his students earlier than he did. "The process did work," Urbanek told the *New York Times*. "Sure it took 17 years, but it also took 17 years for that journalism professor to sic his kids on the case."

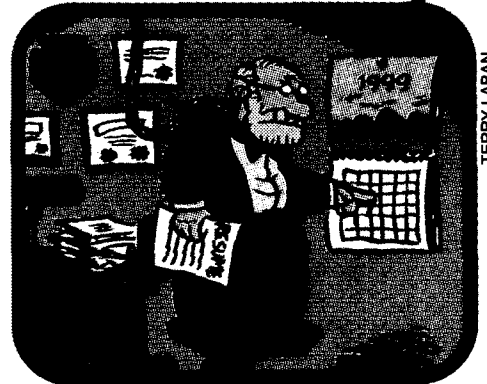
## Psychic-ed Out **8.9**

With psychic friends like these, who needs enemies? Bernardo Arroyo of Modesto, Calif., didn't accept a plea bargain in a drug case because a psychic had assured him he'd spend no time in prison. Alas, after throwing himself to the hands of fate (and waiving his right to a jury trial) before U.S. District Court Judge Oliver W. Wanger, Arroyo found himself facing at least 10 years in the clink—instead of the two years he would have gotten from the plea deal. "For an extra \$8,000, the psychic also offered to put a curse on the assistant U.S. attorney and the drug agents who investigated the case," USA

Today reported. "Arroyo apparently didn't want to spend the extra money."

## Deadline **6.1**

Those who want to make sure posterity remembers them should take heed of a recent notice in the *Times* of London: "To be considered for inclusion



TERRY LABAN

to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, due out in 2004, please be aware that all potential participants must die no later than 31 December 1999, the closing date for the next edition."

Continued from page 5

Koromah's defeat—the RUF regrouped and re-armed. They launched a major offensive this past January that heavily damaged the capital, killed thousands of soldiers and civilians, sent tens of thousands of refugees scrambling to neighboring Guinea—where more than 100,000 already were from earlier fighting—and nearly ousted the Nigerians and the Kabbah government. By early February, however, the rebels—largely driven from the capital and its surrounding hills—were approaching the government for permanent peace talks.

In a pattern emerging in much of the continent, Sierra Leone has become a battleground for outside interests, each seeking control of the lucrative resources of the country. The Nigerians, for one, are well-known to have their fingers in the diamond fields, as does Taylor's National Patriotic Front. However, recent allegations of overt Liberian support for the RUF are probably unfounded, says Scott Campbell of Human Rights Watch, who visited the

border region last summer, though "the border is open for business and the Liberian military is doing little to stop it." Taylor recently announced he would accept U.N. monitoring of the border.



Young *kamajors* must grow up quickly.

Meanwhile, the British Foreign Ministry has been rocked by allegations that Peter Penfold, high commissioner for Sierra Leone, helped former British officer Tim Spicer, head of Sandline/Lifeguard (the name Executive

Outcomes took when it shifted its operations to England) bypass government restrictions on exporting arms and dispatching security personnel to Sierra Leone. Not coincidentally, Sandline shares a London address with Branch Energy, which holds a contract with the Kabbah government to mine diamonds in the country.

The permanence of the cease-fire is difficult to assess. As in Liberia—where ECOMOG helped bring fighting to a close in 1997—the West has turned over the Sierra Leone quagmire to Nigeria, despite its spotty peacekeeping record. The Nigerians have set a May deadline for the two parties to arrange a permanent settlement or see them leave—though few take them at their word. Many elements of the Nigerian military have profited handsomely from smuggling and looting during both wars. The war in Sierra Leone may not be over until the fat generals sing. ■

James Ciment is currently working on a book about Liberia.



# Campus Crusade

By Mike Leon  
MADISON, WIS.

**A**ggrieved by modern college life, a group of evangelical Christians at the University of Wisconsin is threatening the funding of student organizations at public colleges and universities across the nation.

In 1996, five Wisconsin students won a lawsuit against the university, arguing that mandatory fees taken out of their tuition and used to fund student groups they disapprove of violated their First Amendment rights. Among the groups targeted were Amnesty International, the Campus Women's Center and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Campus Center. Last August, a federal appellate court upheld the ruling. The university has appealed the case to the Supreme Court, which is expected to decide whether to hear the case in April.

The lawsuit has provoked outrage among student groups. "The plaintiffs threaten the ability to maintain cultural, intellectual and philosophical diversity," says Brad Manzolillo, a teaching assistant and member of the university student government.

Wisconsin Law School graduate Scott Southworth instigated the suit. Southworth, who now works for staunchly conservative state Rep. Sheryl Albers, says he was spurred by his religious convictions: "As Christians we are called to do the Lord's will. I was called to take a stand."

The overarching concern for Southworth and the other plaintiffs appears to be an ideological distaste for gays and lesbians and other groups that do not fit their conservative Christian dogma. "I would rather not pay for something that is directly against my beliefs," says plaintiff Rebecca Vanderwerf. "It's clearly spelled out in the Bible that homosexuality is wrong. I am not going to condone homosexuality, murder, theft or any sin. Going to Wisconsin, you are surrounded by all these liberal groups that advocate things you don't believe in. Why do I have to pay for them?"

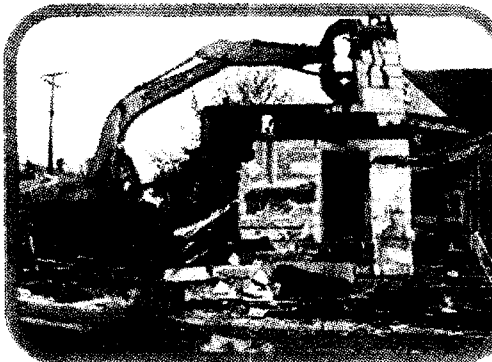
Two religious right legal foundations are funding the plaintiffs, the Arizona-based Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) and the Virginia-based Northstar Legal Center. According to the plaintiff's attorney, Jordan Lawrence, the ADF—which is allied with such religious right organizations as Focus on the Family and the American Family Association—has contributed \$70,000 to the case.

Representing the university, the ACLU and the Wisconsin Department of Justice have argued that the fee system encourages student involvement and is vital to the university's educational mission. "The students here are not required to directly fund money to an organization they don't like," says Jon Furrow, counsel to the ACLU. "What they're doing is funding a pool, creating a public forum. The whole point here is to encourage and facilitate more rigorous speech on all subjects, regardless of their political or ideological view."

If the Supreme Court upholds the ruling, Wisconsin is considering either forming an ad hoc committee or letting the student body vote to determine which groups will face funding cuts.

"A bad decision by the Supreme Court will result in our not being funded," says Mandy Gennerman, a staff member of the Campus Women's Center at Wisconsin. "Everything we offer women will be eliminated. This would put student groups across the nation in the same kind of jeopardy." ■

Mike Leon is a freelance writer in Madison.



RIC GEYER/THE HEIDELBERG PROJECT

## Etc.

### Rainforest Crunch

Citing the need to "intervene immediately," on Feb. 11 the Brazilian government banned new clearcutting permits in the Amazon after the Environment Ministry reported a 30 percent increase in deforestation last year. According to data from a Brazilian satellite monitoring the region, 6,500 square miles of the rainforest were cleared. The Amazon rainforest has lost 205,439 square miles since 1978—more than 10 percent of its original size.

### Stop that Smell

Rural North Carolina can breathe a little easier. On March 1, one of the worst states for corporate-farm pollution will become one of the first to implement odor-control rules for animal factories (see "Down on the Corporate Farm," March 7). The Associated Press reported that under a new law, the state must investigate odor complaints within 60 days. If investigators find a problem, factory farms are required to install proper odor-control equipment and reduce smelly, environmentally hazardous spray-field operations. In 1995, North Carolina suffered the biggest hog-waste spill on record: Ten million fish drowned in 25 million gallons of excrement.

### Heidelberg Bulldozed

For 13 years, Tyree Guyton decorated a blighted block in East Detroit with bright polka dots and a hodgepodge of broken toys, rusty appliances and other relics of our throw-away culture. The Heidelberg Project became world-renowned street art, and tourists came from as far as Europe to visit Guyton's eerie maze (see "The Heidelberg Project," Oct. 4, 1998). But the city won its court battle against Guyton, and the project was demolished on Feb. 4. The project "started out with a social function—to keep crime out of the neighborhood by bringing the public in," artist Kim Humphries told the *Detroit News*. "It has grown beyond that. The artist should be respected, not squashed."

K.K.

# Never Mind the Bollocks

**T**he hothouse world of Beltway journalism has been abuzz for weeks with the *contretemps* pitting two old friends against each other as a result of Bill Clinton's impeachment trial. In one corner: Christopher Hitchens, the investigative polemicist for *The Nation* and *Vanity Fair*, who unapologetically proclaims himself "a socialist, an atheist and a libertarian" and is the only radical of the left to make the roster of TV's talking heads with some regularity. In the other corner: Sidney Blumenthal, a notorious Clinton shill (and alleged White House spy) when he was a journalist at *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*, who later joined Clinton's staff as a media strategist and spin doctor.

Just 24 hours before the Senate vote acquitting Clinton, Hitchens—at the request of the House managers—executed an affidavit making a perjurer out of his erstwhile chum Blumenthal (who, incidentally, was a Boston stringer for *In These Times* 20 years ago). In a videotaped deposition (parts of which were played for the Senate), Blumenthal denied serving as a conduit to reporters for Clinton's pretense that Monica Lewinsky was a "stalker"—a charge that, if proven, could have constituted witness intimidation and thus bolstered the obstruction of justice charges against Clinton. Hitchens' affidavit said that Blumenthal had indeed served up the "stalker" explanation at a March 1998 lunch with Hitchens and his wife.

As soon as Hitchens' affidavit became public, a firestorm of obloquy descended on the British expatriate's head. The *Washington Post* gave the story major play, with writer Christopher Buckley calling the feud "a Chambers-Hiss moment" and anonymous media figures proclaiming Hitchens *persona non grata* at dinner parties. Reams of over-ripe copy slagging Hitchens were churned out for a host of publications. However, given the Clinton camp's long history of trashing the women who've been the target of the Prevaricator-in-Chief's prapic attentions and Blumenthal's own reputation for journalist-bashing that

has earned him the sobriquet "Sid Vicious," few of Hitchens' attackers questioned the veracity of his affidavit. Instead, their ire focused on whether he should have given it at all.

Most of the criticisms maintained, as a *Nation* editorial put it, that there were "moral issues" like a "journalistic (and ethical) presumption against using pri-



vate conversations with friends for a public purpose without first obtaining permission."

Hitchens says that Blumenthal "never said our lunch was off the record; in fact, since at the time I'd been out teaching in California, he showed up with two thick file folders of briefing material [on the Clinton scandals] that he thought I should see, since he wanted to bring me up to date" on the latest White House spin. More importantly, Blumenthal's own lawyer issued a challenge to any reporters with knowledge of his client spreading the "stalker" story, releasing them from "any pledge of confidentiality." No moral issue there, I'd say.

The second major criticism of Hitchens is somewhat trickier. It claims, in essence, that since Clinton was a victim of "sexual McCarthyism," Hitchens should not have voluntarily cooperated with his prosecutors. Hitchens maintains: "I was asserting something *against* authority, in this case Clinton's shop and his use of state power to trash women. Clinton's is a world of soft-money corruption where women are the cherry on the cake. Of all the things said by the left apologists for Clinton, nothing is more despicable than the line that Clinton is a victim of a form of McCarthyism.

That's stupid and unprincipled, and defames the real victims of that inquisition, who were pretty nearly naked before the power of the state, which was engaged in an unconstitutional prosecution of their right to be revolutionaries. Neither is true for Clinton, Harold Ickes and the like." Quite right.

In any case, Hitchens argues that he already had written of the Monica-bashing lunch in the *London Independent* in September (albeit without identifying Blumenthal by name)—the story that provoked the call from the House managers. "I was asked to stick to a story I knew to be true, or dump it," Hitchens says. "I could call myself a liar or stick to the story." And, he adds, "I was a witness against Clinton, in my view, not against Sidney."

Now, I should say that I've been a friend of Hitchens since he first arrived on these shores, and I've written critically about Blumenthal (notably a *Nation* article on how he had tried to "out" the same-sex proclivities of a member of Ken Starr's staff to journalists). However, while I have no doubt that Hitchens thought giving his affidavit was an act of

**Nothing is more despicable than the line that Clinton is a victim of a form of McCarthyism.**

principle, it surely would have been more prudent for him—once he had been approached by the House's agents—instead to have quickly tapped out an op-ed piece revealing Blumenthal's perjury, which one of the dailies undoubtedly would have published. That was an error of political judgment. But it hardly merits the violent pummeling Hitchens has been taking lately.

Sadly, it is Hitchens who is being pilloried for telling the truth, while Blumenthal is elevated to martyrdom for trying to conceal it. As Hitchens notes ruefully, "Clintonism and its culture of lies poisons everything it touches, including this." ■



# Death Penalty Death Watch?

**T**here are many reasons for opposing capital punishment, but perhaps the most compelling one is the inability to correct a mistaken execution. Death is irrevocable, yet humans are fallible.

This was vividly illustrated by the recent case of Anthony Porter, a 16-year veteran of Illinois' Death Row who was released on Feb. 5 as a result of exonerating evidence uncovered by Northwestern University professor David Protess and a group of his students. Porter had been convicted of a 1982 double murder, and he came just 48 hours away from execution last year before doubts about his mental capacity convinced the Illinois Supreme Court to delay his killing. In the meantime, the main witness against him recanted her testimony. And then, in early February, another man confessed to the murder for which Porter had been convicted.

Porter's case, though dramatic, is hardly unique. He is the tenth innocent man released from Illinois' death row since 1987. Porter adds one more count to the compelling "indictment against the death penalty" that Craig Aaron wrote about in the Dec. 27 issue of this magazine. Across the country, in the 23 years since the death penalty was reinstated, more than 500 people have been executed, while 76 have been freed because of innocence.

Barry Scheck, the respected law professor known best for his defense of O.J. Simpson, has noted in a widely quoted calculation that there is one exoneration for about every seven executions. "It's an intolerable level of error, regardless of your views on the death penalty," he says.

Although more than 100 countries have now abolished capital punishment in law or practice, the United States is relentlessly bucking that trend. With nearly 3,600 inmates awaiting execution, the United States has the highest recorded Death Row population on earth. But this dubious distinction seldom provokes much serious national discussion on the issue of capital punishment.

As it is, death penalty issues have been swept into the swamp of electoral calculus in American politics. Any aspiring politician who questions the efficacy of the death penalty for any reason is instantly vulnerable to "soft on crime" charges. Thus, politically ambitious prosecutors are encouraged to



use the death penalty as a stepladder to higher office.

In Illinois, the DuPage County prosecutors of Rolando Cruz and Alejandro Hernandez—who were freed in 1995 after 10 years on Death Row—will soon go to trial on charges that they conspired to frame them in the kidnapping, rape and murder of 10-year-old Jeanine Nicarico. Although such a trial is unusual, it comes on the heels of a *Chicago Tribune* series that exposed a routine acceptance of prosecutorial excesses in Illinois and nationwide. "With impunity, prosecutors across the country have violated their oaths and the law, committing the worst kinds of deception in the most serious of cases," the paper concluded. "They do it to win. They do it because they won't get punished."

Porter's release has provoked the city's two leading newspapers and some major politicians to call for a moratorium on the death penalty until questions about how it is applied can be resolved. But when push comes to shove, it's doubtful whether enough politicians would risk the public disapproval such a measure would provoke. Support for state-sanctioned murder remains high among Americans.

Still, this issue has given death penalty opponents one of their few

moments of optimism in nearly a quarter century of increasing dread. Porter's release shines a bright light on the issue of capital punishment and offers a rare opportunity to place the system's injustice in sharper relief. Ten of Illinois' 160 Death Row inmates have filed requests for new trials based on credible claims that their confessions were extracted by police torture. On a national level, this pumps hope into the ever-growing effort to force a new trial for celebrated Pennsylvania Death Row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal, whose cause has become a symbol of the larger struggle against the racist nature of the death penalty.

Although some death penalty supporters argue that the release of 76 innocent Death Row inmates proves the system works, the cases of the wrongfully convicted pose a serious challenge to the Supreme Court's 1976 ruling, in *Gregg v. Georgia*, which resumed capital punishment. In that decision, the Court ruled that death penalty statutes must contain "objec-

**Porter's release has given death penalty opponents one of their few moments of optimism.**

tive standards to guide, regularize, and make rationally reviewable the process for imposing the sentence of death." It's very difficult to conclude that one exoneration for every seven executions indicates an "objective standard" or a "rationally reviewable" process. This wretched ratio exemplifies the arbitrary quality that led the Court to halt capital punishment in the first place.

The ethical and practical arguments against capital punishment may have to take a back seat to an emphasis on its insult to the Constitution. Some anti-death penalty purists see this tactic as a cop-out or a capitulation to crass contingency—and they're right. But we have to do whatever works. ■



# Reproductive Rights and Wrongs

## A Hard Pill to Swallow: The 10

In Europe, it's known as RU 486, after the original French manufacturer Roussel Uclaf. Here in the United States, it's known by the generic name mifepristone. But for women involved in the 10-year struggle to win approval for its use, the abortion pill is the Holy Grail of reproductive rights. It holds the promise of a safe, non-surgical method to end pregnancy in the privacy of a doctor's office, and would effectively deprive anti-choice zealots of their most visible targets—abortion clinics.

There are still hurdles before the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gives final approval for manufacture and use of mifepristone, but the light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter. Those involved in the approval process are optimistic—even confident—that as we roll into 2000, American women will at long last have another choice.

The saga of mifepristone is long and convoluted, dominated more by political wrangling than medical science. First synthesized in a French lab in 1980, mifepristone blocks progesterone, the hormone that helps maintain a pregnancy. It's used most effectively during the first two months of pregnancy in combination with misoprostol, an approved ulcer medication. The process takes three visits to a doctor, beginning with a dose of 600 milligrams of mifepristone. Two days later, the patient takes 400 milligrams of misoprostol to aid contractions, and remains in the doctor's office for several hours. Two weeks later, she returns for a follow-up visit. The results are similar to a heavy menstrual period lasting about a week, with common side effects of cramps, nausea and vomiting—similar to the morning sickness of pregnancy.

French women have used mifepristone since 1988, and by 1992 both Sweden and the United Kingdom had approved the drug. To date, more than 200,000 women in Europe have used it with virtually no health risks or side effects. If approved in this country, up to 50 percent of all surgical abortions now being performed could be accomplished with doses of mifepristone.

In a perfect world, FDA approval would have come swiftly and decisively because mifepristone works and it's safe. Plus, scientists believe the drug has other impor-

tant medical uses, including treating breast cancer, Cushing's disease, endometriosis, fibroid tumors and meningioma—a brain tumor that predominantly affects women. But the anti-choice lobby has thrown up a series of road blocks since the early '80s to prevent mifepristone from crossing the Atlantic. After threats of boycotts, Hoechst A.G., the German parent company of Roussel Uclaf, refused in 1989 to market mifepristone in the United States. During George Bush's presidency, anti-choice activists won concessions from the FDA to ban imports of the drug.

All the while, pro-choice activists kept hope and the issue alive, working steadily to pave the way for FDA approval. In 1992, Roussel Uclaf announced it would work with a U.S. drug company willing to manufacture mifepristone. So activists went in search of a contraceptive manufacturer indifferent to political pressure and interested in vast potential profits. "In 1992, we did a series of meetings with Ortho and Wyeth-Ayerst encouraging them to take this product on," says Jennifer Jackman, policy and research director at the Feminist Majority Foundation, one of the leaders in the mifepristone effort. "They said anti-progestin research wasn't in their product line." Three smaller companies seemed interested but then backed out, she says, most likely because of the controversy.

Bill Clinton's 1992 election was the jolt pro-choice activists needed. Among his first executive orders in January 1993 was a directive to the FDA to re-evaluate the import ban on mifepristone and assess ways to promote its testing and manufacture.

In the following year, a major log jam was blasted when Roussel Uclaf donated its U.S. patent rights to the Population Council, a nonprofit research organization based in New York and a major supporter of mifepristone. In 1995, the council began a year of clinical trials at 17 sites with 2,121 women. The results, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Archives of Family Medicine*, were an unmitigated success. Nearly all of the women in the study said they would recommend the abortion pill to others and they would choose it again if necessary.

In 1996, the FDA accepted the clinical data and issued approval for the Population



# 'Near Fight for Mifepristone

By Annette Fuentes

Council to take the next step in bringing mifepristone to the U.S. market. A pharmaceutical manufacturer was needed and Gedeon Richter, a European company, stepped forward. But when the subject is abortion, Murphy's Law is operative. Gedeon Richter quit without explanation in early 1997 and the approval process slammed to a halt. Had the company not backed out, mifepristone could have been available two years ago. "Abortion politics is the overarching thing," says Sandra Waldman, spokeswoman for the Population Council. "It meant that no existing pharmaceutical company would touch the drug."

So if no company would get involved, a new one had to be formed. Enter Danco, a group of private investors that came together to bring the abortion pill to the U.S. market. Danco won't say much about its owners or how they operate because of concerns about anti-abortion extremists. "We're a start-up pharmaceutical company dedicated to women's health," says Danco spokeswoman Heather O'Neil.

Working with the Population Council, Danco is steering mifepristone through the painstaking FDA approval process, which O'Neil says is moving smoothly. "The FDA's outstanding issues are about manufacturing," she says. "All the clinical trials were done using Roussel's drugs. The FDA now has to inspect the new manufacturing plant." Danco will then distribute the drug directly to doctors' offices for use under strict supervision. O'Neil wouldn't say where the drug is being manufactured because of security concerns, but did say Danco is confident that mifepristone will be available by the end of the year.

Not if the anti-choice politicians in Congress have their way. As the curtain falls on the presidential impeachment show, the House and Senate will resume their business, and on the agenda of several representatives is defeating FDA approval of mifepristone. Last summer, the House passed by a vote of 223 to 202 an amendment to prohibit the FDA from funding the testing, development or approval of any drug that causes abortion. Authored by Rep. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), the amendment was tagged onto an agricultural appropriations bill. Although it died during

Senate-House conferencing, Coburn and fellow conservative Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) have distinguished themselves as tenacious foes of women's reproductive freedom. Smith led an attack on an amendment to guarantee health insurance coverage of birth control for federal employees. During the debate, Smith sought to define common contraceptives, including the IUD, as forms of abortion and to prohibit insurers from covering them.

"There were nine pro-choice seats gained in the last election but we still have an anti-choice Congress," says Bonnie McEwan, legislative director of Planned Parenthood. "We expect there will be a fight, but we expect to win." McEwan noted that the new House leadership has vowed to focus less on the conservative morality issues, such as abortion, but she doesn't believe Coburn and Smith "will just fall into line with the speaker."

Women in the United States are not the only ones who will reap the benefits of mifepristone when it finally becomes available. The FDA's stamp of approval will likely trigger activity in other countries, says Sally Ethelson of Population Action International, a research and advocacy organization in Washington. "Many developing countries do not have the regulatory systems in place to evaluate drugs coming onto the market," she says. "So many of them look at FDA approval because it's considered to be the most stringent evaluation process in the world. If the FDA approves mifepristone, it would make it available in many other countries." Given the World Health Organization's estimate of 70,000 to 100,000 deaths yearly from unsafe or self-inflicted abortions, providing women with a safe choice is simple humanitarianism.

Still, nothing about mifepristone and the abortion debate can be simple. Even as mifepristone hovers within reach, its approval so tantalizingly close, anti-choice extremists have upped the ante in the past year with acts of violence that can only be understood as an assault on women's autonomy. "Nobody gets to what underlies all this," McEwan says. "Margaret Sanger said it 80 years ago: The established order doesn't want to see women truly empowered." ■

**In a perfect world, FDA approval would have come swiftly and decisively because mifepristone works and it's safe.**



## The Good Guys

By Kristin Kolb



### Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.)

The leading senator in the fight for reproductive choice, Boxer fought hard for the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. This year, she will reintroduce the Family Planning and Choice Protection Act, which would mandate Medicaid coverage of abortion, full contraceptive coverage in all health plans, federal protection of abortion clinics, an increase in funding for reproductive health research, and approval and distribution of mifepristone.



### Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine)

The first-term senator served in the House for 16 years and is a former co-chairwoman of the Congressional Women's Caucus. Snowe isn't afraid to deviate from the Republican Party line, particularly on women's health issues. She was a vocal critic of the global gag rule the Pro-Life Caucus pushed through Congress. She sponsored the Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage Act, which would have required health plans to cover all contraceptives—a major issue as only 15 percent cover the five major contraceptives (the pill, diaphragm, IUD, Depo-Provera and Norplant). Although the bill didn't pass, Snowe successfully amended an appropriations bill to require full contraceptive coverage for federal employees.

# The Real Smeal

## The Feminist Majority Speaks Out

Since its founding in 1989, the Feminist Majority Foundation's National Clinic Defense Project has been charting the rise of anti-abortion extremism and providing direct aid to clinics at risk of harassment and violence. Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation, recently spoke with Annette Fuentes about the future of reproductive rights in this country.

*You must feel like Cassandra because you've been warning about the growing violence by anti-abortion extremists for so long.*

It's been very difficult. Initially, people just said I had an attitude. But our knowledge was based on experience and research. We knew this was getting deadly. [Anti-abortion extremists] were first bombing empty buildings. They were giving specific death threats and we thought they'd go to an assassination strategy. They did. The worst, of course, is they have now gone to lethal bombings, sniper attacks and butyric acid attacks. People do not understand because the reporting has predominantly perpetuated a lone-wolf theory.

I believe there will be a tremendous backlash against [the anti-abortion extremists] if we have the will to stay the course and fight. Three groups—Planned Parenthood, the National Abortion Federation and the Feminist Majority Foundation—are working together to provide security and help to clinics. The NOW Legal Defense Fund is helping legally. It is a tremendous work load. As [the November 1998 murder of Dr. Barnett Slepian] was happening, a clinic in Raleigh, N.C., received a bomb threat that was serious. That same week, we had the anthrax scare and a hoax bomb in the Birmingham, Ala., clinic that was bombed



before. There were 19 butyric acid attacks, fake bombing attacks, lethal bombs and an assassination, all in 1998.

*Why have the media and the government been slow to*

*react to anti-abortion terrorism?*

Part of it is just simply denial. But secondly, it seems like our democracy is so stable. There can't really be terrorists here. It almost makes us look extreme by reporting what's happening.

*January 22 was the twenty-sixth anniversary of Roe v. Wade. What is the future of this important legal milestone?*

Roe v. Wade is at risk. Until [the November 1998] election, Congress was three votes shy of overriding the president's veto of the [late-term abortion] ban. Next election we still have to worry about losing the ability to stop a filibuster. If we lose the presidency in the year 2000 and keep the majority of both the House and Senate dominated by the right, then we could lose the Supreme Court again. Much hangs in the balance. George W. Bush is opposed to abortion. So we cannot be fooled. Women's rights are struggling.

I want to say to all feminists: If you took a siesta, if you decided it was all solved, forget it. We need you now if we're going to secure the victories of the 20th century for the 21st century. If we're going to stop the terror, we've got to change the political climate and we have to stop the extremists. It all goes hand in hand. We had to expect that if we advanced feminism, they would start shooting us. We have a patriarchy that feels threatened. If we're going to solidify our gains, we've got to rally our forces now. There's no social revolution that didn't have to worry about the backlashes. ■

### Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.)



When it comes to reproductive rights, Nita Lowey is miles ahead of her congressional colleagues. As chairwoman of the House Pro-Choice Task Force, Lowey sponsored more pro-choice legislation in the 105th Congress than any other senator or representative. She has fought to increase funding to prevent teen pregnancy, ensure that health plans provide women with access to OB/GYNs, institute federal security at abortion clinics and repeal the law that prohibits abortions at overseas military hospitals. She also was the House sponsor of Snowe's contraceptive coverage amendment and Boxer's Family Planning and Choice Protection Act. Lowey is a leading Democratic candidate to replace Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 2001.



# Money Changes Everything

## The Right Invests To Limit Choice

**R**eligious right and anti-choice activists are putting their money where their politics are. Over the past five years, a handful of small but aggressive investment funds hot-wired to the Catholic Church and Christian fundamentalist groups have been spreading the gospel of conservatism the old-fashioned, Wall Street way.

Most conservative funds, like the Orlando-based Timothy Fund, grounded in Christian fundamentalism, simply screen out investments that offend its values. President Art Ally gets investment advice from Pro Vita Advisors of Ohio, which monitors "corporate America's direct and indirect involvement in the abortion industry," and from Life Decisions International, a New York anti-choice group that tracks supporters of Planned Parenthood. American Express and Merrill Lynch fail the Timothy screen because of their contributions to the nonprofit.

Other funds use shareholder activism and strong-arm tactics to influence corporate policies, philanthropy and product lines. The Dallas-based Aquinas Funds, for example, goes for high performing investments and tries to effect change. Aquinas adheres to the guidelines of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which opposes not only abortion but contraception in general. As shareholders in drug companies Pharmacia & Upjohn and American Home Products, Aquinas has lobbied to phase out their lines of birth control drugs. Aquinas also wants to put warning labels on contraceptives, alerting consumers that they could induce abortion—an anti-choice myth, not medical reality.

In 1997, CEO Frank Rauscher boasted that Aquinas had used its stockholder

status to convince major pharmaceutical companies—including Teva, Merck, Abbott Labs, Johnson & Johnson and Pharmacia & Upjohn—to neither produce nor distribute mifepristone. Rauscher told *Mutual Funds* magazine in 1997 that his argument to company management was economic, not religious: "As a shareholder, we were concerned about the litigation possibilities that may arise if one of the companies that we owned got involved in that pill." Rauscher also says Aquinas pressured Chase Manhattan Bank to stop contributing to Planned Parenthood.

Conservative investment funds have hardly racked up fat profits for their flocks. The performances of both Aquinas and Timothy have been less than dynamic since they were founded in 1994, but that's not unusual in the arena of socially responsible investing. The real question is how successful their pressure tactics have been in influencing companies that support reproductive health choices. That is more difficult to gauge. While Rauscher claims to have scared off drug companies from making mifepristone, he hasn't produced documentation to prove it. And American pharmaceutical companies were intimidated by the controversy surrounding mifepristone long before Aquinas appeared on the scene.

Jim Minow, Planned Parenthood's development director, says corporate support has increased in recent years. As the names of individual donors are kept confidential, Minow would not say whether Chase Manhattan has been a donor. But he insisted that "no anti-choice organizations have ever been successful in pressuring any corporation from continuing support of Planned Parenthood." **A.F.**

### Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.)

Smith—a huge fan of the Christian rock group Petra—is serving his tenth term in Congress. Co-chairman of the House Pro-Life Caucus, he successfully sponsored the global gag rule, a bill to prohibit funding for international family planning organizations that advocate choice. Smith also co-sponsored the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act. "Those who fashion themselves as 'advocates of children' and 'pro-women' while promoting or even acquiescing to abortion," he says on his Web site, "are either hypocrites or are living in an unhealthy state of denial."



## The Bad Guys

By Kristin Kolb



### Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.)

Emerson—the first woman elected to Congress from Rush Limbaugh's hometown—introduced the Right to Life Amendment in 1997. This constitutional amendment would declare any reference to the word "person" in the Constitution to mean "any unborn person." She also co-sponsored the Partial-Birth Abortion Act. According to Emerson, *Roe v. Wade* "has done little to set women free" and denied women "the opportunity to love and be loved in America."



### Rep. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.)

A physician who boasts he has "delivered more than 3,000 babies," the three-term congressman is a darling of the religious right. Coburn co-sponsored the Partial Birth Abortion Act and passed legislation prohibiting medical students from performing abortions. His Child Custody Protection Act would make it a federal crime to help an out-of-state minor get an abortion in states that do not have parental consent laws. Coburn is an obsessive promoter of sexual abstinence—he has crusaded across northeastern Oklahoma giving "abstinence education presentations" complete with medical photos that "graphically display the consequences of sexual relations outside of a monogamous marital relationship."



## Quinacrine Crimes

By Christine McConville

Now banned in both India and Chile, the battle over quinacrine appears to be waning. More than 100,000 women have been sterilized by the drug, and its use has sparked a worldwide debate about health risks and the motives of its supporters.

Quinacrine is inserted as a pellet into the uterus. It dissolves, travels into the Fallopian tubes and causes scarring, which blocks the tubes and causes irreversible sterilization. Lab tests have found that quinacrine also causes cells to mutate, increasing the risk of cancer.

The drug's sole distributors are Stephen Mumford, head of the North Carolina-based Center for Research on Population and Security, and Elton Kessel, secretary general of the International Federation for Family Health in Leasburg, N.C. They argue that quinacrine is safer and cheaper than surgical sterilization, and that they are saving women's lives by preventing unwanted pregnancies in countries with a high risk of death from childbirth complications. Mumford and Kessel have handed out the drug in 19 countries—including Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan and the United States—primarily by linking up with other physicians who advocate its use. And according to a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, several Vietnamese women were given quinacrine during routine gynecological exams not knowing its irreversible impact.

Mumford and Kessel are supported by the right-wing Leland Fikés and Scaife Family foundations. The Federation for American Immigration Reform also has advocated for the distribution of quinacrine to researchers, clinicians and government health agencies worldwide.

Despite these well-heeled and well-connected supporters, no regulatory body currently supports quinacrine's use as a sterilant. Both the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the

# Losing Choice Worldwide

## Maquiladora Tests Screen Out Pregnant Women

**M**exico's maquiladora operators like the abundant, cheap labor of their mostly female work force. But they don't like the fact that women can get pregnant. That's because Mexican labor codes mandate a generous array of maternity benefits, including six weeks paid leave before and after giving birth, as well as a guarantee that women's jobs will be waiting for them when they return.

The solution for many maquiladoras is to use urine tests as part of the job application process to screen out pregnant women. Even after women are hired, they often are forced to submit to periodic pregnancy tests to keep their jobs. Several corporations, including Siemens, a German electronics company, and Lear, a U.S. auto parts manufacturer, require women to report to infirmaries with proof that they're menstruating.

Such abuses were carefully documented by Human Rights Watch in a report released last December, which details 53 cases of pregnancy discrimination at 50 factories along the U.S.-Mexico border and in Baja California. The culprits are a who's who of the multinational export sector: Samsung, Matsushita, Sunbeam-Oster, Sanyo, Pacific Dunlop, Johnson Controls and Tyco International, as well as Siemens and Lear. The maquiladora sector is a heavyweight in the Mexican economy, employing more than 1 million workers and generating \$55 billion in exports last year.

The companies make no bones about their pregnancy policies and practices, even though they would seem to violate both Mexico's labor laws and Constitution, which prohibit sex discrim-

ination. That's because the Mexican government has sided with the multinationals by claiming that pregnancy testing isn't a form of sex discrimination, but rather a legitimate part of the hiring process. Even labor unions have refused to take a stand for their women members and, in some cases, have colluded with the factory owners in shutting women out of jobs. "In Matamoros, where they have the highest unionization rate among maquilas, a woman said one union would not send her out to a job because she was pregnant," report author Le Shawn Jefferson says. "So she went to a different hiring hall, didn't reveal her pregnancy and had no trouble getting a job referral."

In 1997, Human Rights Watch filed a petition with the U.S. Labor Department, charging that the Mexican government is violating NAFTA side agreements, which prohibit abusive labor practices. How well NAFTA works to protect Mexican women will be a good test of the covenants that labor advocates on both sides of the border pushed for. So far, talks between Mexico and the United States on the issue have been grinding along, says Jefferson. Although, in one positive development, the Labor Department told Human Rights Watch it would convene a conference on women and work in Mexico sometime this year.

Meanwhile, women's autonomy and health are in daily jeopardy because of workplace discrimination. "We have heard of women hiding their pregnancies or delaying prenatal care because they didn't want to miss work or were afraid to ask for a day off," Jefferson says. "Women are making reproductive health choices under threat." **A.F.**

World Health Organization have recommended against further human trials of quinacrine sterilization. Last year, the FDA ordered Mumford and Kessel to destroy their existing quinacrine stock.

India's Supreme Court banned quinacrine sterilization in 1998 after six years of illegal clinical trials. That year, quinacrine also was banned in Chile—where it was first introduced in the '70s—due to intensive organizing efforts in the

women's health movement and recommendations by the World Health Organization.

But the fight to end quinacrine use is far from over. Mumford says he plans to continue manufacturing and distributing it overseas. The Committee on Women, Population and the Environment (CWPE), an opponent of quinacrine, thinks Mumford will concentrate on countries with weak regulatory mechanisms and strong population

control policies, such as China.

"Mumford has argued that feminists who oppose quinacrine are 'the pope's handmaidens,' the enemies of birth control," CWPE's Betsy Hartman told the *Boston Globe*. "But the conflict over quinacrine is not about pro-choice vs. anti-choice. It's about safe vs. unsafe contraception." ■

**Christine McConville** is a writer in Chicago.





# Reeling in Rio

## Carnival confronts the global economy

By Kelly Candaele

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

**I**n the day before the start of Carnival, Marlilene Monteiro's young students practice the intricate moves of the samba, the dance they will display in the Carnival parade. While her "Union of the Heart" samba school has been preparing for this year's parade virtually since the last one ended, Monteiro is still scrambling for sponsors and money to pay for costumes, a parade float and other Carnival essentials.

Her students are from the poor areas of Rio de Janeiro, the *favelas*, where makeshift homes are dug into the granite mountainsides that surround Rio and symbolize a deeply divided society. Carnival has been called a "ritual of inversion," five days when the poor and dispossessed own the streets, asserting their physical and cultural presence through ostentatious costumes and the samba's pounding Afro-Brazilian rhythms. But Monteiro is less interested in sociological insights than in tracking down another couple hundred *real* (about \$100) for her school. "This year seems to be more difficult for some reason,"

year there is an added dimension. The world is watching Brazil's weakening economy for signs of revival after the value of the *real* was cut in half against the dollar when frenzied international currency traders fled the Brazilian market, fearing a Russian-style meltdown in the tropics. There are worries that the "contagion" in the world's eighth-largest economy could spread, first to Argentina and then around the world.

Brazil is also a test case for the International Monetary Fund's ability to police the world economy by imposing austerity measures on economies in need of "structural reform." In IMF-speak, "reform" means accepting free trade, open currency markets, privatization of state run enterprises, work force flexibility and restrained federal spending. In Brazil, the \$41.5 billion the IMF has promised to shore up the economy comes not with strings attached but with a rope. Growing numbers of Brazilians believe that rope will be used to hang them. Outside the "Sambadrome," the mile-long parade route in downtown Rio, attorney Francisco Chagas clutches his throat when asked about the role of the IMF in the Brazilian economy: "They give us the money, they grab us right here and they tell us to be quiet."

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso is an advocate of "modernizing" the Brazilian economy along fairly orthodox macroeconomic lines. Several large state-run enterprises have been privatized since his first election as president in 1994, and he has encouraged openness and flexibility for foreign investment and changes in Brazil's labor codes, particularly for public employees. The leader of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), the centermost of Brazil's several left-leaning parties, Cardoso was architect of the 1993 "real plan" when, as finance minister, he helped tame the country's rampant inflation by tying the Brazilian currency to the dollar. He was re-elected to a second term last October, defeating Workers Party (PT) candidate Luis Inacio da Silva, popularly known as "Lula," and several others by a substantial margin.

Cardoso has accepted IMF and establishment premises that the problems with Brazil are internal: large budget and trade deficits, crony capitalism and too much involvement of the state in the market. He agreed to \$16 billion in federal and state budget cuts in return for the first installment of the IMF loan last year. Prior to the dramatic January devaluation of the Brazilian currency, Cardoso tried to sustain the confidence of foreign investors by defending the value of the *real* through high interest rates that kept foreign and domestic investment in the country. He also made moves to cut Brazil's federal budget deficit, and he pushed through a tax on retired federal employees, whom many Brazilians saw as part of a pampered elite.



Under  
the IMF  
plan,  
Brazilians  
are losing  
their shirts.

she laments. "The businesses that we have always depended upon to help us are not as willing this time."

There is always a political subtext to Brazilian Carnival. The samba school theme songs and *enredos*, the story lines of the parade performances, often contain references to the common people's struggle for equality and freedom, in addition to an overall appreciation of the sumptuous spectacle of life. But this

ANTONIO SCORZA/AF

But in early January, when former President Itamar Franco, now governor of the state of Minas Gerais, refused to pay debts owed to the federal government, international investors saw Cardoso as weak, ran for the door and took billions of dollars with them. Franco and a group of governors from six other states have joined together and called upon Cardoso to renegotiate their debt payments. In a reversal of his previous policy of not negotiating with these "opposition governors," Cardoso has agreed to work to resolve this ongoing political crisis that continues to undermine his credibility. Earlier he had threatened to suspend federal payments to the states that refused to pay their debts and called upon the ostensibly neutral World Bank to cancel funding for projects in the states that did not cooperate.

At the same time, Brazil remains one of the most economically polarized societies in the world, with 10 percent of the population owning almost half of its wealth. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the richest 10 percent of the population have more wealth than their American counterparts, and the poorest are 10 times as poor. Half of the working population is part of the informal economy paying no taxes or pension contributions. And there are still millions of landless peasants, a glaring testimony to a political inability to deal with one of Brazil's most wrenching problems. "Our year doesn't start until after Carnival," says Sandra Veiga, director of the Federation for Social Assistance and Education (FASE), one of the largest nongovernmental organizations in Brazil. "But later this month, we are getting together with labor groups, landless organizations, churches and the Workers Party to

plan a series of actions that we will carry out in opposition to the current policies."

Unions, NGOs, peasant movements and political parties are preparing a post-Carnival agenda that will challenge the government's austerity program and the IMF's role in Brazilian life. They are calling for a restructuring of the country's external debt, increased taxes on Brazil's wealthy and job programs for the poor. There already has been a sit-down strike at the Ford factory in São Paulo after the company announced its intention to lay off 2,800 workers. And according to Ivo Bucaresky of the Rio Workers Party, the likelihood of people taking to the streets is high. "We are not going to accept the views of Thatcher and Reagan for Brazil," he says.

**T**he ongoing debate in Brazil is essentially about whether national sovereignty and democracy have any meaning when international currency speculators can have a greater impact upon a country than elected representatives. There are clear indications that poor and working people are not simply going to surrender their judgment on economic and social issues to the tender mercies of domestic and international technocrats.

Fiscal restraint, flexible labor markets and few barriers to the international flow of capital are standard procedure when dealing with the demands of the IMF. Critics from some unlikely places are pointing out that the IMF's austerity policies are a primary cause of economic sickness rather than its cure. While hardly an ideological revolution, when Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs accuses the U.S. Treasury and the IMF of having "driven a large part of the developing world into recession" and

George Soros describes the current international financial markets as "the main cause of the economic epidemic," it is clear that an intellectual sea change is underway.

In late January, even *Business Week*, in an editorial that could have been written by Lenin, accused the IMF of forcing austerity policies on countries that transform "bad debt problems into economic debacles." The magazine pointed out that IMF policies are largely designed to protect banks and called for large public works programs and a restructuring of Brazil's foreign debt. "Restructuring" is a polite word for default, and the mere uttering of the word sends hot-money investment bankers rushing to find Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin's phone number. International creditors want to be paid on schedule and under the terms and interest rates they were promised.

**I**n the favela of Borel in Central Rio, Artur de Brito wonders about the future of his family. A television blasts a Brazilian soap opera throughout his one-room home, the walls of which are covered with pictures of Vasco, his favorite local soccer team. "I voted for Cardoso in the last election even though Lula was a worker like me," he says. "Now my construction work has stopped, and I don't know what will happen next." ■

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# Obstacles to Peace

## Paramilitaries and U.S. policy stand in the way of ending Colombia's civil war

By Ana Carrigan

**T**here are times in Colombia, and this is one of them, when the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse appear to have taken up permanent residence in this beautiful and tragic land. The Jan. 25 earthquake that devastated Colombia's coffee growing region was the worst since 1875. It's hard to fathom the catastrophic human consequences—"biblical," President Andrés Pastrana called them—that the recent earthquake left in its wake in the city of Armenia. The number of recovered dead—almost 1,000—dwarfed by the more than 2,000 people who disappeared and are not expected ever to be seen alive again; the homes of more than 6,000 peasant families destroyed; 35,000 homeless families; 250,000 people suddenly without jobs, or a roof, or any possessions or any means of supporting themselves. No one will ever know the sum of individual tragedies—the families, lives, plans and dreams—that lie, torn to shreds, buried beneath disaster statistics on such a scale.

Even before the earthquake struck this had been a nerve-racking New Year. Hope, absent for so long, has been riding high on Pastrana's commitment to ending the hemisphere's oldest insurgency war. So when talks between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were formally inaugurated on Jan. 7, and the national media and hundreds of national and international celebrities descended on the small, tropical town of San Vicente del Caguán to bear witness to history in the making, for one short and happy week it finally seemed possible that Colombia's yearnings for peace might be respected by those with the guns.

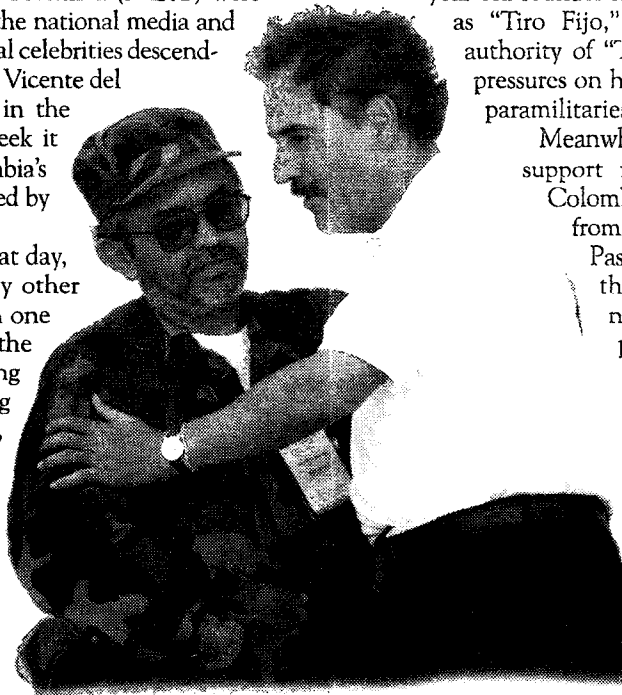
Yet elsewhere in Colombia on that day, new violence raged. As in so many other peace processes, opening talks with one side has enraged the other. Even as the people of San Vicente were dancing in the square to the ear-splitting music of Ivan and his Bam Band, flown in by the government from Bogotá for the post-inaugural celebrations, right-wing paramilitaries, acting on their threat to

sabotage the peace talks, went on a rampage. In undefended villages and rural townships, where local army and police sat out the killings in their barracks, the toll from dozens of massacres mounted. During the next four days, more than 150 people accused of guerrilla sympathies were slaughtered. The militarists in the FARC, who remain unconvinced that peace through negotiations will deliver the radical political changes for which they have fought their entire lives, froze the talks, pending government action to attack and disband the paramilitaries.

**N**o one ever said peace negotiations in Colombia would be easy. First, there are two long-lived guerrilla forces—the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—with different priorities, constituencies, ideologies and methods, which have been fighting the state for more than 35 years. Within the last two years, the 15,000-strong peasant army of the FARC has won a string of military victories, and between them, the insurgents now control almost 40 percent of the national territory. Both forces, however, are split along generational lines. Within the FARC, the younger militarists, who believe peace can be imposed with their guns, are opposed to the policies of the would-be peacemakers, led by the FARC's legendary 68-year-old founder-leader, Manuel Marulanda, known as "Tiro Fijo," or "Sureshot." Fortunately, the authority of "Tiro Fijo" is still supreme, but the pressures on him to delay negotiations while the paramilitaries run amok are certain to increase.

Meanwhile, lacking more than rhetorical support from his generals—or from the Colombian rich, who hope to be "rescued" from the FARC by U.S. military aid—

Pastrana has been unable to deal with the greatest obstacle to peace: the nearly 10,000 heavily armed, well-paid (largely with drug money) right-wing paramilitaries. First formed 18 years ago by the army for counter-insurgency, the paramilitaries now act as the militarized arm of the Colombian far-right. In the countryside they carry out a scorched-earth policy against the guerrilla's social base that has created 1.3 million internally displaced refugees, while simultaneously "cleansing" the land for their financiers' ben-



Colombian President Andrés Pastrana embraces comandante Raul Reyes of the FARC at peace talks in San Vicente.

MARCELO SALINAS/AFP

efit. In the cities, they provide death squads to order. On Jan. 28, paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño announced the opening of "a second front in the war"—against nongovernmental organizations—when he sent thugs to seize the director and three staff members of the Institute for Popular Training (IPC), a highly respected NGO in Medellín. Castaño is holding two of the victims of the daylight raid as "POWs."

The paramilitaries seek political recognition and are prepared to murder their way to the negotiating table. Since, in accordance with the old adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," many senior and mid-level army officers and their troops continue to give the paramilitaries tacit protection and support, the paramilitaries now stalk the land like Frankenstein. Created by the state, this monster has escaped its control.

Finally, the insurgency and counter-insurgency are not the only wars in Colombia. Washington's "war on drugs," specifically its aerial drug eradication program, has not only failed to affect production of Colombian coca and poppy plants for the worldwide cocaine and heroin market by one iota, but it has created schizophrenic confusion in U.S. policy just when clarity and united, bipartisan support for the Colombian government's peace efforts is most crucial. Pastrana, who is trying simultaneously to end the insurgency and Colombian drug production, needs the collaboration of the FARC to eradicate the coca and poppy plantations. Since the coca growers are also the FARC's social base, further aerial spraying—which is funded by the U.S. Congress against the wishes of the Colombian government—threatens to erase the entire peace process.

By expunging the line between "counter-narcotics" and "counter-insurgency," the drug war has drawn the Pentagon into an ever-deepening alliance with the failed Colombian Army, and, by extension, with the murdering paramilitaries; it also has recruited countless young peasants into the guerrilla ranks. The growing relationship between the two armies, north and south—unaccompanied by demands either for sanctions against known paramilitary supporters in high command positions, or for obedience and execution of presidential orders to attack and disband the paramilitaries—risks further eroding critical civilian authority over the Colombian Army. As the warm relationship between the Pentagon Southern Command and the Colombian generals progresses, it is fair to ask why the "narco-paramilitary" consistently fails to make it onto the Clinton administration's list of enemies. U.S. interests would be better served if U.S. money, equip-

ment and training—now going to fight impoverished coca farmers and their "narco-guerrilla" protectors—instead were deployed to combat the drug-trafficking paramilitaries that are holding Colombia hostage.

Still, something new is stirring in Colombia. At long last, the population has decided—en masse—to repudiate the war. For the first time, a civic society has emerged, and civilian leaders are organized in regional and local peace commissions in every city, town and rural community nationwide. The long overdue debate over the kind of country Colombians want to construct from the embers of their terrible war has begun.

**P**astrana is not the first president to try to end the political violence, but he is a new kind of Colombian leader: a centrist of courage, character, imagination and principle. He understands that achieving peace with Colombia's guerrillas requires more than a seat in Congress in return for silencing the guns. Pastrana knows that any durable peace will require confronting the root causes of the insurgency—land ownership and economic and social justice for the poverty-stricken peasants.

These are issues that have bedeviled Latin American societies since the beginning of this century, and which no Latin nation has solved. What makes Colombia such a fascinating country today is that at the ideologically exhausted end of the century, in the midst of their appalling carnage, Colombians are still actively searching for new answers to an intractable, age-old question: How do you construct a more just, more equitable society?

This is Pastrana's challenge. His decision to facilitate talks by creating a demilitarized zone the size of Switzerland in the tropical southeastern coca-growing region controlled by the FARC—in the face of opposition at home and in Washington—took political courage. It has paid dividends. Today, the DMZ is the only region in the country where there is no violence. Since the army and police withdrew last Nov. 7, only one person has died violently. An unarmed civic police force takes care of routine law enforcement in five small towns, and the civilian population and the local municipal authorities are collaborating peacefully with the FARC in an experimental, power-sharing arrangement. Even after the talks were officially frozen, the FARC and government negotiators met and reached agreement on the implementation of the first pilot programs for coca eradication, alternative crop development and reforestation of rainforest territory devastated by peasant colonizers.

Pastrana has extended the DMZ until May. His decision was opposed by the Colombian generals and the Republican right in the U.S. Congress. But the people of San Vicente, capital of the demilitarized region, terrified that any return by the army would bring paramilitaries in its wake, were greatly relieved. From the local perspective, so far, this experiment in co-habitation with the guerrillas is working just fine. ■

Ana Carrigan is the author of *The Palace of Justice, a Colombian Tragedy (Four Walls Eight Windows)* and is writing a new book for Verso on the search for peace in Colombia. Research for this article was funded in part by the investigative fund of *The Nation* Institute.

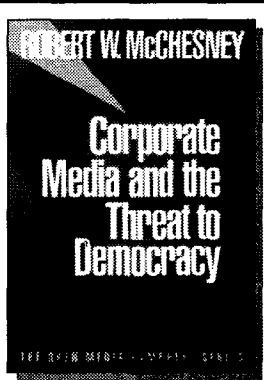
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# Man of the People

## President Hugo Chávez challenges Venezuela's political establishment

By Steve Ellner

**W**hen Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was elected in December, he proclaimed, rephrasing Walt Whitman, "I am a little bit of each one of the children who run, who dream, who die of hunger, of misery, today in this very instant in Venezuela."

Chávez, who took office on Feb. 2, has made a greater commitment to the poor than any president in the nation's history. His determination to achieve radical change has been put to a long and protracted test. As far back as 1982, he was part of a conspiratorial military group called the "Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200" in honor of the bicentennial of Simón Bolívar's birth. Inspired by struggles in Venezuelan history for social justice, they considered themselves a civil-military movement, though they lacked a clear vision of the type of democracy they wanted to achieve. "We always upheld the notion of the participation of the people," Chávez said recently. "We stressed political work in the barrios, with the peasants, workers, students and in the streets."

In February 1989, when mass riots broke out throughout the country because of deteriorating economic conditions, the military was forced to repress the civilian population and an estimated 1,000 people, most of them poor, were killed. Chávez's group held President Carlos Andrés Pérez responsible for the casualties, which included a member of the core group of military dissidents. Three years later, these junior officers, opposed to the government's corruption and neoliberal policies, staged a coup. But lacking support from the Air Force, the rebellion was crushed.

However, it generated a surprising degree of public sympathy and catapulted Chávez to center stage. After his release from prison in 1994, Chávez emerged as the Venezuelan politician who most fervently criticized the political establishment. He was clearly rewarded for this stance at the polls in December, pulling in 56 percent of the vote and trouncing the two main establishment parties, the formerly leftist Democratic Action (AD) and the right-leaning Copei. Although these two parties have dominated the political scene since the outset of democracy in 1958, together they scored only 9 percent of the presidential vote. Explaining this outcome, Ernesto Mayz Vallenilla, the founding rector of Simón Bolívar University, says, "In the deepest chamber of the Venezuelan people's soul, there exists an immense charge of rage and frustration generated by this party-dominated democracy run by a coterie of corrupt politicians."

**Hugo Chávez (pictured with his wife, Marisabel) has made a greater commitment to the poor than any president in Venezuelan history.**

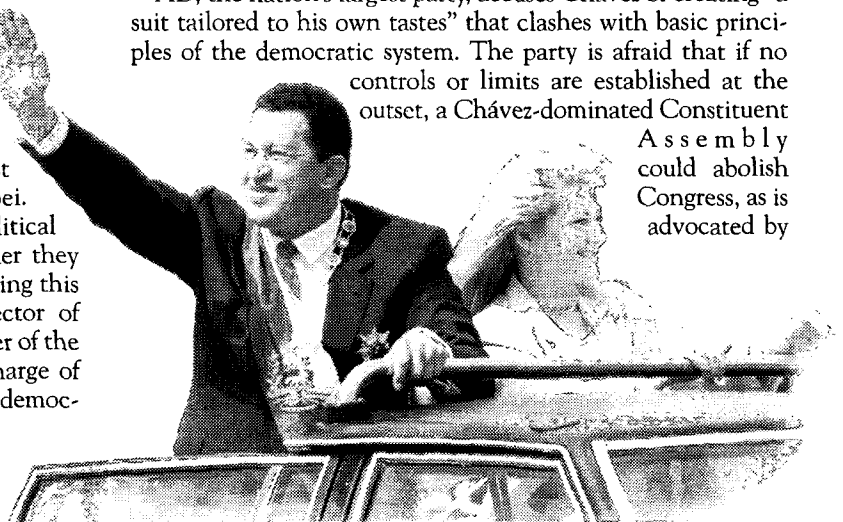
**A**n expert in military strategy, Chávez carefully has defined his battlefield and chosen his foes. His battle cry is the convocation of a Constituent Assembly to overhaul the political system and supplant the political elite. When it comes to political reforms, Chávez has indicated that the sky is the limit. He is especially intent on revamping the legislative and judicial branches as well as organized labor and the armed forces, all of which have been thoroughly penetrated by the establishment parties.

During the campaign, the establishment parties staunchly opposed the Constituent Assembly, but now they recognize Chávez's victory as a mandate for the proposal. They insist, however, that Congress, not the president, formally convene the assembly and define its responsibilities. The day he took office, Chávez decreed that the proposal for a Constituent Assembly will be submitted to a popular vote and that, if approved, the executive branch will define its procedures and powers. Subsequently, Chávez announced that he will "promote and personally participate in" popular assemblies throughout the country to establish a set of priorities to serve as a guide for the Constituent Assembly.

The proposals formulated by his political allies include a unicameral National Congress, popular election of judges and direct elections for the top leadership posts of organized labor and political parties. Chávez also has called for granting military officers the right to vote and assume public positions. "We resolutely oppose the old system of voting for party-devised slates," says Ramón Castillo, a pro-Chávez former congressman from Caracas. "The delegates to the Constituent Assembly should be elected individually on the basis of their own merit, and a number of them should represent distinct sectors of the population."

AD, the nation's largest party, accuses Chávez of creating "a suit tailored to his own tastes" that clashes with basic principles of the democratic system. The party is afraid that if no controls or limits are established at the outset, a Chávez-dominated Constituent

**Assembly could abolish Congress, as is advocated by**



BERTRAND PARRES/AFP

leading members of his governing party. AD has challenged the decree in the Supreme Court, a move that could lead to a showdown between the three branches of government.

**N**evertheless, Chávez clearly has his work cut out for him. For decades, Venezuela has been a privileged Third World country, blessed with oil reserves and stable democracy. However, Venezuela's political elite squandered a golden opportunity in the '70s, when OPEC oil prices peaked at \$36 a barrel; instead of achieving genuine economic development, the nation fell \$35 billion in debt. With last year's 50 percent decline in oil prices, Venezuela is suffering from inflation and sluggish economic growth—the two unsavory ingredients of stagflation.

At the outset of his presidential campaign, Chávez pushed for radical economic changes. He called privatization of the oil industry and other key sectors unconstitutional and bad-mouthed the IMF. But he has toned down his rhetoric to calm the fears of the private sector, even promising to comply with Venezuela's agreement with the IMF to implement austerity measures.

The conservative drift of idealistic and youthful radicals is a time-honored phenomenon, but for many businessmen, Chávez's switch to moderation appears too good to be true. Some fear a hidden agenda. He has attempted to convince investors of his good intentions, stressing that reform of the judicial system under the Constituent Assembly will establish clear rules and do away with the tedious legal proceedings, arbitrary decisions and corruption of the courts—which are just as repugnant to the business community as to ordinary citizens.

For now, the business sector is unlikely to enter the political fray or confront Chávez. "In spite of well-founded reservations, private investors are taking a wait-and-see attitude," says Robert Bottome, editor of the pro-business magazine *VenEconomy*. "Actually, textile industrialists, among others, seem to be enamored of Chávez's talk of protectionism, even though they don't have the foggiest notion of how Chávez is going to protect them."

**W**ith some of the world's largest oil reserves, Venezuela is of special concern to the United States. Chávez's electoral triumph undoubtedly has the State Department worried, words of encouragement notwithstanding. Making matters worse, at the outset of Chávez's presidential campaign, when his chances of winning seemed remote, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told reporters in Caracas that the former rebel leader would not receive a visa because Washington prohibits entry of those who have attempted to overthrow a democratically elected government. That decision has been reversed, but Chávez's rivals harped on the issue as evidence his candidacy was sending

danger signals abroad. As one U.S. embassy official notes, "The smear campaign promoted by Chávez's opponents was picked up by U.S. journalists passing through here on assignment, who portrayed Chávez as a wild-eyed radical and played up the possibility of violence."

Some of his policies are likely to step on big toes. Shortly after his election, for instance, Chávez visited neighboring countries where he pledged to unite regional trading blocs Mercosur, the Andean Pact and Caricom of the Caribbean nations. This impulse could place Chávez on a collision course with the United States, with its strategy of drawing Latin American nations into NAFTA one by one rather than in a bloc. "We feel that NAFTA should accommodate itself to Latin America, not vice versa," says Planning Minister Jorge Giordani, a '60s radical who has not completely mellowed over the years. "We need to break out of the United States' interminable economic grip."

Chávez's rhetoric on Latin American solidarity is undoubtedly inspired by Simón Bolívar, the hero of Venezuela's independence, whom he never tires of quoting. Before his death in 1830, Bolívar wanted to exclude the United States from his scheme of hemispheric unification and predicted U.S. opposition to Latin American unity for self-serving reasons.

Like Bolívar, many of Venezuela's new breed of radical politicians are military officers. In their view, the ultimate role of the armed forces is defense of national sovereignty from multinational corporations and globalism promoted by the United States. "The United States tells us that since the Soviet Union no longer exists, the armed forces in Latin America has lost its reason to be," says Hernán Gruber Odermán, a leading military rebel in 1992 whom Chávez named as governor of the Federal District. "But our armed forces was not created in response to the Cold War, but rather dates back to the outset of independence."

Chávez's military background and his intransigence toward the political establishment has led political commentators both in Venezuela and abroad to brand him a despot. But unlike leaders such as Peru's Alberto Fujimori—who closed Congress and the Supreme Court and used his unchecked authority to impose unpopular, IMF-style austerity measures—Chávez is dedicated to mass participation in the form of referenda and popular assemblies to decide on the nation's new Constitution. Riding the crest of his own popularity, particularly among the underprivileged, it is unlikely that he will place the burden of the economic crisis solely on the lower classes.

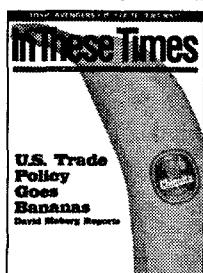
Simply by forcing the wealthy to pay what they owe in taxes, Chávez will go along way in spreading the sacrifices across class lines. If he does nothing else, Chávez will have accomplished more than his predecessors who have governed during this protracted economic crisis. But Chávez has pledged to do much more. The long-range goal of breaking Venezuela's dependence on oil and promoting independent economic development in this age of global imperatives looms as his greatest challenge. But it's one that a nation fully mobilized around a charismatic leader committed to progressive change may be in a realistic position to achieve. ■

*Steve Ellner has been teaching economic history at the Universidad de Oriente in Puerto La Cruz since 1977. He is the author of three books on Venezuelan history and politics.*

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# IN THESE TIMES

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ATR02

# Our National SUV

By James North

**T**he sport-utility vehicle, the icon of the Clinton era, is much like the president himself—too large, a guzzler of fuel, intent on immediate gratification and a significant obstacle to stopping the deterioration of the global environment.

As Mark Hertsgaard points out in his impressive new book, *Earth Odyssey*, half of all new motor vehicle sales in the United States are trucks and sport vans, some of which get barely 10 miles to the gallon, using laughably cheap fuel with prices that do not represent the true cost to the environment. He

**Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future**  
By Mark Hertsgaard  
Broadway Books  
372 pages, \$26

notes that these vehicles are larger than many houses in the Third World. And he poses the obvious question: How can the United States, which has betrayed so many of the green promises of Clinton/Gore's first campaign in 1992, appear at international forums and complain that, say, people in China should help prevent global warming by being more careful with their coal-burning stoves?

Hertsgaard's book, six years in the making, is a much-needed look at ecology on a global scale, and an indispensable corrective to First World-centric views. All around the world, he sought out local people, listening patiently to points of view that are all too rarely aired in the West. Mabub ul-Haq, the late Pakistani economist, tells him: "Although global warming has yet to kill a single human being and may not do so for centuries, it has received enormous attention and resources. At the same time, silent emergencies that are killing people every day—the fact that 1.3 billion people around the world lack access to clean water, the fact that 150 million people live in desertifying areas—do not attract the same kind of screaming headlines and well-funded action plans."

**F**or *Earth Odyssey*, Hertsgaard journeyed to the plains and forests of East Africa, through a poisoned nuclear zone in Russia, to traffic-choked Bangkok, Thailand, and along the Amazon River in Brazil. But his most extensive—and some of his best—work was in China, which faces growing environmental danger and world-record air pollution: "Passing through the larger intersections of Beijing, I looked both ways down the cross streets but could see no farther than half a block; beyond that, an impenetrable gray mass concealed everything." And yet he finds that many Chinese, including Zhenbing, his engaging and highly intelligent guide and interpreter, are certainly aware of air pollution—but believe that people who live in it become acclimated, reducing the danger.

But Hertsgaard is sympathetic, not judgmental. He shows just how poor China is, and why the Chinese place a high priority on economic growth. "China lacks capital," Wang Wenxing, a Chinese scientist, tells Hertsgaard. "When setting up a power plant, 15 to 30 percent of the investment funds should be spent on environmental technologies like scrubbers. So China has a choice between building four plants that emit sulfur dioxide and other pollutants or three plants that do not."

Then there are the provocative views of Chinese official Zhou Dadi: "The Americans say China is the straw that breaks the camel's back on greenhouse gas emissions. But we say, 'Why don't you take some of your heavy load off the camel first?' If the camel belongs to America, fine, we'll walk. But the camel does not belong to America ... what else are we supposed to do? Go back to no heat in winter? Impossible."

Another great weakness of Western ecologists has been an at times willful misunderstanding of the population question, placing it at the center of the Third World's problems, and suggesting, sometimes harshly, that the poor themselves are to blame for having too many children. But, as Hertsgaard shows, the terribly unequal patterns of world consumption mean that his San Francisco

friends, whose second child is on the way, will soon have, in terms of the strain on global resources, the Brazilian equivalent of 26 children.

Given such dramatic disparity—and our own intransigent consumption—are the interests of the better-off and the poorer parts of the planet inevitably antagonistic? Not necessarily. Hertsgaard may not have had the time or space to look even more closely at the Third World nations he visited. For instance, he suggests that Bangkok is choked with traffic because Thai people, like Americans, "want" automobiles. The truth is more complex. The Thai elite, awash with billions in international investment, dominate elections by spending astonishing sums to buy votes outright; the estimated total spent in the November 1996 campaign was \$1 billion, more than even the American election the same month. Key elements of this elite are businessmen who live by lavish



construction and roadbuilding contracts. This is why Bangkok, a city of 10 million people, has expressways but still no subway, and luxury shopping malls but no decent housing for the poor. In no way can Thailand today be said to represent the personal preferences of the Thai people.

Hertsgaard also adopts, a little too readily, the common view that people in the Third World are unsophisticates, brainwashed into adopting Western patterns of consumerism. Again, the truth is more complicated. What motivates consumerism in the Third World is more than just shallow imitative behavior. For starters, consumerism seems to increase during the migration from country to city. In a brave new faceless urban world, do you wear Adidas shoes as a kind of totem, an insignia that says you belong after you leave the village, where your place was known and secure? Or might you instead forge an identity by participating in inde-



pendent organizations in civil society? The latter course of action is made more difficult if you work long hours in a sweatshop, spend yet more hours crossing the city in an overcrowded bus and, in a country like China, face official disapproval and even arrest if you try to organize independently.

Hertsgaard also might have gone into greater detail about environmental movements in the Third World. Thailand may be dominated by money politics, but grass-roots groups there did successfully pressure the government to ban further logging in 1988, after floods caused by deforestation washed away entire villages. Early last year, 10,000 villagers in India's Narmada Valley, the majority of them women, temporarily blocked dam construction—and the movement already had forced the World Bank to end its share of funding for the Narmada mega-project. Such direct action can only grow, as environmental conditions worsen every day.

**B**ut grass-roots activity by itself is not enough. Hertsgaard proves that the planet needs international governmental action. General Motors, for example, will not improve vehicle efficiency unless Toyota is also forced to do so, and Indonesia will not stop clear-cutting its forests as long as Japanese companies are permitted to import the wood.

Bill Clinton, our national SUV, has both the popularity and the clout to take a leadership role in such global environmental governance. Yet while he blathers on about "saving" Social Security, he has ignored a far more disturbing long-term problem. He could use his high approval ratings—and his undeniable powers of persuasion—to build American support for genuine global action on the environment. His failure to seize this valuable opportunity, not the sour impeachment trial, could turn out to be his worst legacy. ■

*James North has reported from Africa, Asia and Latin America. He is completing Structures of Sin, a look at the globalizing world economy.*

*Gregnik Proto II, mixed media, by Gregory Green. From **Weird Science**, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Mich., on exhibit until April 3.*

# Satyrs and Salesmen

By Elizabeth Millard

**I**n Chinese restaurants around the nation, perhaps even at this moment, a diner is breaking open a fortune cookie with a sense of furtive hope, as if a random and simplistic prognostication will change the dynamic of a single life. As the cookie is broken and the vague message is read aloud, there's also a good chance that someone at the table will lean forward and utter that tiresome old joke of appending "... in bed" to the end of each printed prophecy. The punchline is that the fortune nearly always still makes sense when this spin is added.

American culture, with its love of whispered confession and self-punishing politicos, has become a figuratively unraveling fortune, where Monica Lewinsky's testimony is tweezed apart for sly sexual signals, and X-Files viewers desperately yearn not for revelation about alien conspiracies, but for the moment when agents Mulder and Scully finally get it on.

Yet this is also a country where elementary school students are accused of sexual harassment, colleges publish weighty statements and rules about sexual conduct, companies are formed specifically to find new ways of blocking online porn from the eyes of wee cyber-

## Satyricon USA: A Journey Across the New Sexual Frontier

By Eurydice

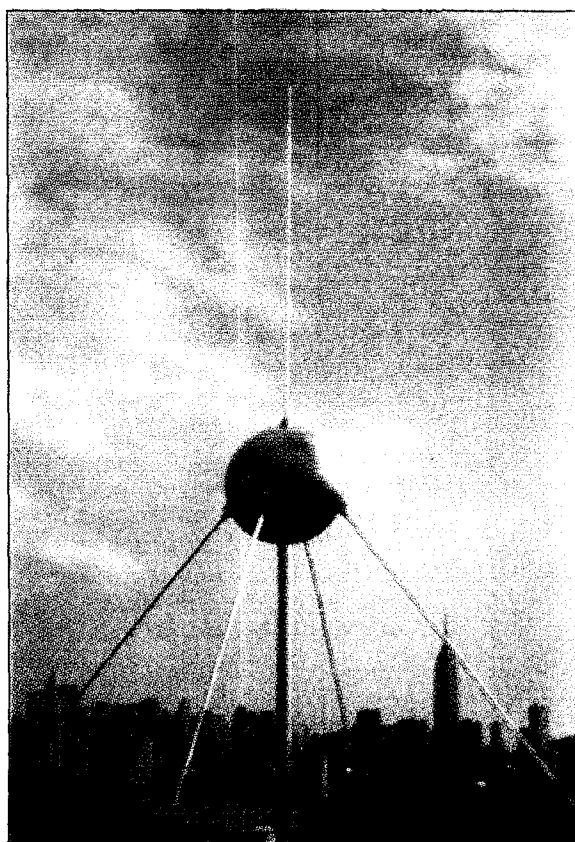
Scribner

256 pages, \$22

surfers and the words "sexual" and "ethics" can now be slammed together and packaged as business seminar material. This duality, between Apollonian justice and Dionysian appetites, would seem to prohibit locating a norm from which we can determine sexual deviations. Yet that doesn't stop everyone, from armchair social scientists to Jerry

Springer's guests, from trying. Amateur sexologist and hip *Spin* writer Eurydice's contribution to the oft analyzed battle of sexual expression vs. puritanical repression is an intelligently written, insightful account of her journey through the darkest, sweatiest and most pheromone-ridden sex depots our fair nation has to offer.

**I**n Greek mythology, Eurydice was the unfortunate bride of Orpheus, who tried to lead her out of Hades and failed. The modern-day Eurydice reverses the journey, willingly descending into dank bars and addict meetings to explore the terrain of sexual deviation. In the original *Satyricon*, written by Roman dandy Petronius in the first century, the book's protagonist, Encolpius, suffers the wrath of the god Priapus in a series of erotic



episodes. *Satyricon* is also a subtle denunciation of Rome's narcissism, caused by a loss of its republican values to the lure of Mammon. The conflation of erotica and politics is a theme that continues to this day, but more importantly, Petronius' formidable work shows that sex and society—their tendency to be both contradictory and complementary—is an ancient topic. It seems our destiny to be unable to separate the two, even after the “sexual revolution.”

In her introduction to *Satyricon USA*, Eurydice writes, “What interested me was the prospect, inherent in every society, that in time the social margins would expand enough to become the status quo.” Armed with this goal, she attempted to find those who sought pleasure in such kinky behavior as bloodletting and necrophilia, while exploring more pedestrian topics like the appeal of strip clubs, the prevalence of sex in the military and the question of whether monsignors masturbate.

She didn't want to document the bizarre, describe the freaks nor just answer the question, “What's considered the fringe?” Instead, she writes, “I'm interested in what we don't talk about when we talk about sex—starting with the panhistoric assumption that sexual desire is the beast lurking in our social jungle whose containment is the prerequisite for a moral, stable civilization; and ending with the suggestion that sex is used in our public life as a loud distraction from important practical, emotional, and ideological issues.”

But Eurydice found her direction wavering from the moment she was surrounded by drag queens at a gala, who offered her spontaneous confessions. Her thoughts on intimacy near the beginning of the book are razor sharp, but by the end, her exposure to so many variations on the same theme cause her to abandon definition altogether. There is no fringe, she concludes slowly, and there are no freaks. There are only ordinary people searching for a way to

escape the mundane.

In the workplace, relationships and friendships, the amendment of “in bed” to mental ruminations and plain conversations is difficult to stem. The never-ceasing wave of mixed messages crashes every time the television is flicked on or a magazine is perused—sex can be both celebrated and demonized within a lone 30-second commercial. With a new consciousness surrounding sexual harassment, rules are formed around this shaky, contrary foundation, and it's little wonder why people on the sexual “fringe” create elaborate precepts before even taking their socks off.

In her travels, from lesbians who cut each other in San Francisco to frustrated American priests in the Vatican, Eurydice continually stumbles into earnest housewives, cute grandparents, sighing businessmen and confused college students. The tactics these groups use to experience sexual independence, jarring at first, eventually take on an aura of the familiar, even the dull. In describing a New York S/M bar, she writes that the place smells of mold, urine, leather and dirt: “The mass of store-bought gear simulating machismo is sinis-terly offputting; maleness is worn in effigy and fun, like a pawnshop war ribbon. It occurs to me that America's ethos of discipline and forbearance and bravado has come to this: the family man

who nurses a lust for the whip, the businessman who yearns to be hung, the yuppie with a taste for piss.”

Even during interviews with necrophiliacs, it's not the strangeness of their sexual hobby that comes through, but the inescapable boredom they fight, and the longing to be understood. “I'm a recluse,” one lover of the dead says. “I find most people exhausting and ultimately crazy. Necrophilia isn't confusing. There are no mind games, no rejection, no funny looks, no long-term financial and emotional investment.” Except for the short reference to

mortuary visits, the speaker's words differ little from the justifications offered by those who prefer non-committal flings over serious relationships.

Ultimately, Eurydice realizes that the harder she tries to uncover the sexual mores of a nation at unrest, the more she slips into what theologians call “wise ignorance”: the willingness to acknowledge that what we know increasingly reveals what we don't know. “I had expected to bring some of our secrets to light and, by so doing, take away their power to intimidate,” she writes. “Instead, I found not the darkness stirring behind the normalcy of America, but the normalcy stirring peacefully behind the darkness.” In other words, Hades looks a lot like a typical middle-class living room.

**T**his country always has favored clear distinctions between right and wrong, yet sex is one of the murkiest gray areas in our culture, encompassing not just the physical deed, but its accompanying outcomes—and its propensity to land the sexually adventurous into the emotional small claims courts of talk show television. Since any assertion that there's a “norm” for sexual practice is based purely on an individual's experience and education, socially and religiously, it would follow that no deviation exists, that “the fringe” is just some piquant phrase we use to describe people who do what we don't like or don't dare.

Separating those who get aroused by the lash of a whip, or the smell of formaldehyde wafting off the object of affection, from those who practice only the missionary position turns the issue into an arbitrary opposition between “healthy” and “abnormal.” Removing the gray area this imposes a simplistic order onto a naturally complex topic. It is a recipe for addressing issues in a superficial, quick-fix manner, producing the type of truly unhealthy duality we're seeing now with its preponderance of sexual images fashioned to excite competing with anti-sex messages designed to repress and shame. Perhaps someday we will all see the normalcy stirring peacefully behind the darkness ... in bed. ■

**Elizabeth Millard** wrote about the secret history of vibrators in the Jan. 10 issue.





# Revolt in the Cubicles

By Joe Knowles

When enjoying a comedy, I try not to think about its politics, which, if at all existent, are often pretty dismal. Usually mainstream humor acts as a kind of safety valve for the ruling elite, poking fun—but not too much—at this or that inanity, onerous institution or fact of life. The gentle comedies of Horace, Shakespeare and *Seinfeld* are perfect examples of this type of elegantly contained rebellion.

## Office Space

Written and directed by Mike Judge

But there is also a long tradition of satirists with a serious ax to grind. Juvenal, Swift, Lenny Bruce (and, having just seen *Life Is Beautiful*, I'm inclined to add Roberto Benigni) rank among history's few genuinely dangerous humorists. I would not put Mike Judge, creator of *Beavis and Butt-head* and *King of the Hill*, in this company of comics. But his latest project, the white-collar comedy *Office Space*, does edge tantalizingly close to gleeful insurrection.

*Office Space* is a movie about an oppressed computer programmer named Peter (Ron Livingston), who loathes his mundane job at a typically cheesy hi-tech firm called Initech (for "Initiative Plus Technology") in a generic suburban office park. At the workplace, Peter is joined by an ensemble cast that includes an irritatingly chipper worker-bee who says things like "sounds like somebody's got a case of the Mondays" when he fails to show the proper company spirit. The film also targets organizational loyalty in a subplot involving Peter's love interest (Jennifer Aniston), who endures an individuality-enforcing manager at a perky, TGI Friday's-esque theme restaurant, where she's required to festoon her uniform with novelty buttons.

The movie does a fairly good job proletarianizing Peter's assorted working-stiff colleagues. They don't aspire to anything much beyond attaining a thimble's worth of respect—or just not getting fired. One programmer, an Arab

immigrant named Samir, merely wants his peers to correctly pronounce his last name; another, Michael Bolton, only wishes others would not laugh at his. At the very bottom of the hierarchy is the pathetically beleaguered Milton (the subject of some of Judge's old animated shorts), a stuttering natterer who obsesses over minute instructions and covets a shiny red stapler.

Yet the film doesn't skewer today's organization man by making easy sport of the poor drones in the cubicles. Instead, *Office Space* quite ruthlessly goes after the boss. The hilariously despicable vice president, Lumbergh (Gary Cole), torments everyone in his path, especially Milton. Perpetually sipping coffee and nagging employees in a nasal, maddeningly calm tone, he embodies "all that is soulless and wrong," according to Peter. And one Friday, when Lumbergh corners Peter to make him work through the weekend, the hassled twentysomething programmer snaps. He sleeps in on Saturday, and sauntering into the office late (and in flip-flops) on Monday, he resolves to get himself fired.

Meanwhile, the higher-ups at Initech have brought in two slithery management consultants—one with a decidedly Hitlerian mustache—whose job is to see how many names they can ax from the payroll. "We try to avoid confrontation whenever possible," they tell Lumbergh, explaining why they won't tell the mumbling Milton he was canned. Not surprisingly, most of Peter's other colleagues don't make the cut either. And when the consultants call in Peter, who has nothing to lose, he tells the bastards exactly what he thinks of the place. But rather than getting the heave-ho, his frankness makes him seem like a hip

Silicon Valley business radical, "a straight shooter with upper management written all over him."

Perhaps the most intriguing element of *Office Space* is that Peter doesn't go for it. The hi-tech serfs, refusing to be divided or co-opted, fight back. In one priceless scene, they take the office's fax machine to an empty field and smash it to pieces. Peter takes a promotion, but then hatches a scheme with (the now jobless) Samir and Bolton to rip off the company for hundreds of thousands of dollars. With Raskolnikovian justification, Peter reasons that Initech is an "evil corporation" and deserves it. And he's right: He's just seen the company—for the sake of a few extra points on the stock market—lay off intelligent people who have given over their best years to the firm.

Such is the radical promise of *Office Space*, but alas, the revolution doesn't last—and the rip-off scheme goes disastrously awry. Yet despite the white-collar troika's eventual, inevitable surrender, the movie does remain unapologetic



Exacting sweet vengeance on the office fax machine.

about the abject servitude of toiling for a profit-maximizing coterie of preferred stockholders.

This is more than I can say for the tame *Dilbert* comic strip (and now animated TV series), which also satirizes office life. That long-running strip by Scott Adams preserves a kind of dignity for its characters, despite the managerial depravity, internecine office warfare and pointless memoranda. *Office Space*, with all its relentless trashing of the technocracy, doesn't hold out any such hope. The truth is that, for most people, work really does suck. ■

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

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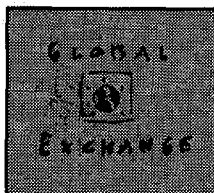
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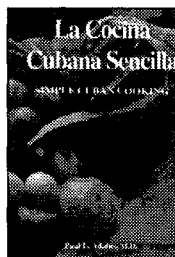


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Continued from page 30

Some of the black veterans sought the advice of civil rights attorney Julius Chambers, chancellor of Durham's historically black North Carolina Central University. Chambers said the case piqued his interest because he remembered that when he was a law student at the nearby University of North Carolina in the '50s, the Chapel Hill American Legion held social events for law students—white law students. He confirmed that the Legion, which has been a veteran's service organization since 1919 and is chartered by the U.S. Congress, is required to follow federal civil rights laws. "You can't have a federally chartered entity that discriminates," Chambers told the group.

He advised the men to reapply. Seven did one afternoon in December. As they milled around the foyer, post assistant manager Wilma Garner took applications, dues and copies of discharge papers. It was Tyson's third visit to the club. Post 7 Commander Dasch says that the black veterans had not been admitted before because they had not provided the necessary proof of service or dues. "They just come in and lay an application down and think they are a member," he complains. There was no discrimination in the post, he says, pointing out that in recent months, "we also signed in a Hispanic, an Oriental," who did provide paperwork. In fact, Post 7 had at least one black member, according to the commander of the "black" Post 175.

But Post 7 remained white and unwelcoming to blacks. White Durham psychologist Steven Giles [who is the author's husband] applied for membership at the behest of the black veterans. Giles fulfilled most of his service in the Air Force reserves. Yet it was Giles, not the combat veterans, who received a warm welcome at Post 7. On his first visit, he was invited for a drink at the bar. When he filled out his application, Giles said he didn't have his discharge papers handy—would the post accept some other documents that mentioned his terms of service? They would. All Giles had to do, the service officer told him, was come to the next meeting, and he would be sworn in. He received no form letter, heard nothing about needing a sponsor or personal identification. The next week, on Oct. 7, the membership voted him in.

Steve Thomas, a spokesman at the American Legion's national headquarters in Indianapolis, says that "posts have a right to determine their own membership." However, "they aren't allowed to exclude based on race," he says, because "a veteran is a veteran." While the national office of the Legion does not gather statistics on the race of its members or officials, it's clear from the monthly magazine for members, *The American Legion*, that the organization is still geared toward World War II veterans and is politically conservative. And of the 75 people pictured in illustrations and photos in the December issue, one man in a group picture was black.

In North Carolina and at the national level, "I find very few blacks in any type of leader-

ship," says Wayne Manley, the veterans' service officer for Durham County, who is black. "Are we represented proportionately? We are not." The Disabled American Veterans, another service organization, and the sprawling federal Department of Veterans Affairs "represent the veterans' population better," Manley says.

In most urban areas, veterans say the Legion is integrated. Yet in suburban and rural areas, "some of these posts are just about all black members, and some are just about all white members," says Bill Rockel, who is a member of an all-white, small-town post in North Carolina.

It's impossible to know if a post is willfully segregated until someone of another race shows an interest, and in most American Legion posts, no one is trying to upset the balance. But after a warning call from an associate of Chambers' in January and notice that a story about the black vets would appear in the daily paper, a representative of Post 7 called each of the black veterans to invite them to a Jan. 11 meeting. Six attended, finally making it past the foyer. When the prospective members left the meeting room so that the membership could vote on their induction, Post Commander Dasch reported that the applications were in order.

The vote was not unanimous. It was 25 to 6 "with four members leaving in protest as the new members were escorted back into the meeting," Giles says. "To their credit, the officers did the right thing. Several gave supportive speeches." But he also heard a patron at the bar offer that it was "a sad but inevitable day."

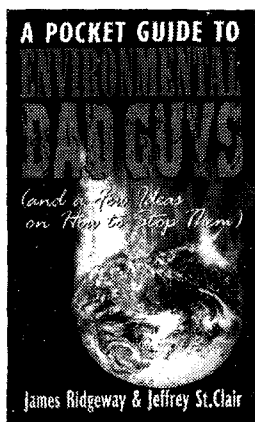
It was 1999, and integration had arrived. ■

Pat Arnow lives in Durham, where she works as a freelance writer. She is a former culture editor of *In These Times*.

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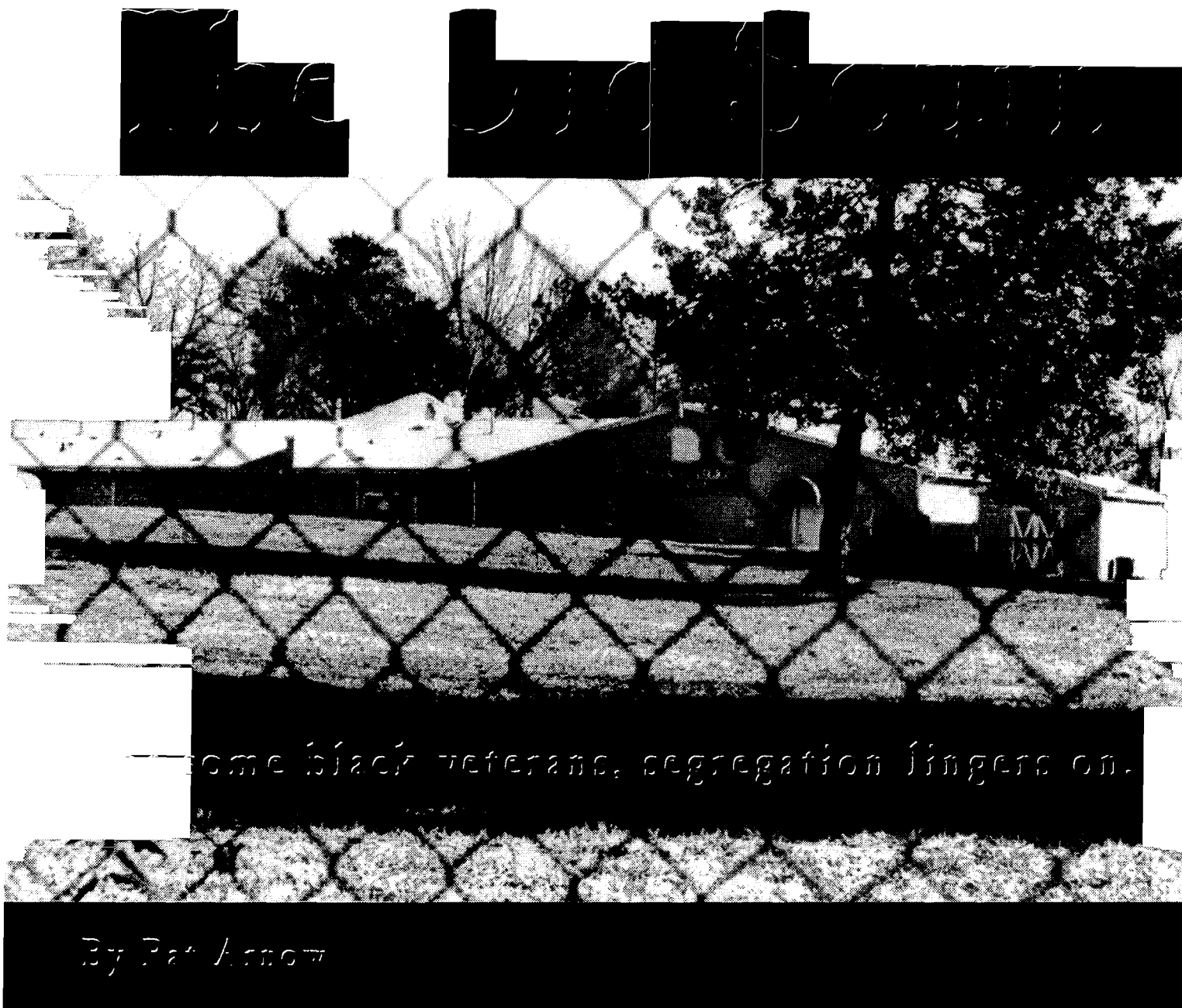
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**W**hen Doug Tyson first rang the doorbell of American Legion Post 7 in Durham, N.C., last May, he was surprised that he didn't get past the foyer. A disabled Vietnam veteran, he didn't realize that this veterans' service club, located in a black neighborhood in a mid-sized central Carolina city where half the population is black, was segregated. "The guy opened the door," Tyson says. "I told him that I was a Vietnam veteran, that I wanted to join. He told me I must have the wrong post. He went and looked in the phone book and found a guy's name, and he told me to call that guy about joining Post 175."

When Tyson called the number, it became clear that he had been referred to a small post across town with an all-black membership. When he returned to the white post to fill out an application, this time with two other black veterans, he still didn't know how much trouble he and his friends would have getting in. But they, and at least seven other black veterans

who applied, spent months trying to join the largest post in the region. The post dragged out the process, not even responding to their applications for six months.

Meanwhile, the post conducted a recruiting campaign, offering a free tie to anyone in their group who could bring in five new members. At least a dozen white veterans, including Durham Mayor Nick Tennyson, joined the group during the months the black vets were trying to get in. (Post 7 Commander Les Dasch personally dropped off an application after Tennyson expressed an interest in joining, says the mayor.)

In November, six months after the first three black veterans had applied for membership, all 10 of the African-American applicants finally received a form letter from Post 7 Adjutant Tom Sexton. They were told they needed an American Legion member in good standing as a sponsor. They also had to provide copies of their discharge papers and \$20 in dues.

*Continued on page 29*

PHOTO BY PAT ARROW